

NO PROBABLE PURPOSE

T-H-E
SOUND
TSP
PROJECTOR

→ **9th** ISSUE 2001 ←

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The Sound Projector

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ANOTHER EDITORIAL OF BITTERNESS AND BILE...

THIS ISN'T A PARTICULARLY PROFOUND OBSERVATION, BUT I HAVE BEEN TRYING TO ACCOUNT FOR WHY THE BBC SERIES OF *I LOVE 1970* AND THEN *I LOVE 1980* HAVE BEEN SENDING ME INTO **BLIND FITS OF RAGE.**

ED BAXTER REMARKED TO ME HOW REGRESSIVE AND INFANTILE OUR SOCIETY IS BECOMING. WHAT DO PEOPLE SAY ON MOBILE PHONES? THEY SAY 'WHERE ARE YOU?' AND 'COME AND GET ME', TWO FAMILIAR CRIES OF LITTLE CHILDREN IN THE DARK WHO WANT THEIR MUMMIES. GROWN ADULTS ARE RIDING SCOOTERS AND ROLLER SKATES DOWN THE STREETS. IF WE'RE ALL RETREATING TO THE COMFORTS OF WHAT IS FAMILIAR AND KNOWN, THEN NO WONDER WE WANT TO

LOOK BACK AT THE PAST

WITH SUCH HUNGER.

THE TV SERIES GO FURTHER THAN WALLOWING IN NOSTALGIA. THEY SHOW AND TELL US WHAT THEY WANT US TO SEE, CONSTRUCTING AN IMAGINARY COMMUNITY OUT OF THE SONGS AND IMAGES OF 20-30 YEARS AGO. THE IMPLICATION IS THAT WE ALL LIKED THE SAME THINGS, WATCHED THE SAME TV SHOWS, WORE THE SAME CLOTHES, SANG THE SAME SONGS, AND HAD THE SAME IDEAS. KNOW-NOTHING NON-ENTITIES ARE NOW ELEVATED TO THE STATUS OF SOCIAL COMMENTATORS, SIMPLY BECAUSE THEY HAVE A 'HILARIOUS' TAKE ON OLD TV ADVERTS FOR K-TEL PRODUCTS, OR 'COOL' OPINIONS ON CRAP TV SHOWS LIKE STARKY AND HUTCH.

THE ONLY WORLD THAT MATTERS TO A TV SHOW IS THE WORLD THAT HAPPENED ON TV. OTHERWISE THEY HAVE NO ARCHIVE OF CLIPS TO REGURGITATE. ANYTHING THAT DIDN'T HAPPEN ON TV MIGHT AS WELL NOT HAVE EXISTED AT ALL. BUT WORSE, EVENTS OF ANY SORT ARE ONLY DEEMED TO HAVE ANY SIGNIFICANCE AT ALL IF THEY ARE PART OF THIS DUMBED-DOWN POP-CULTURE VIEW.

THE BEST EXAMPLE OF THIS IS JERRY DAMMERS' 'GHOST TOWN', WHICH PREDICTABLY ENOUGH GETS VOMITED OUT ON ONE OF THESE *I LOVE 1982* SHOWS, IMMEDIATELY AFTER A BRIEF FLURRY OF CLIPS WHICH SHOWS THE BRIXTON AND TOXTETH RIOTS - DOCUMENTARY EXAMPLES OF WHAT WAS 'REALLY GOING ON' IN BRITAIN AT THE TIME. 'GHOST TOWN' ISN'T A BAD LITTLE MESSAGE RECORD, AND CLEARLY THE RIOTS IN THE UK (AND LIFE IN THE DESOLATE URBAN SPRAWL OF COVENTRY) ARE WHAT INSPIRED THE LYRICS. BUT AS FAR AS THIS TV SHOW IS CONCERNED, THAT'S ALL THERE IS TO THE STORY. THEY DON'T OPEN OUT THE DEBATE. WE COULD ASK WHY SOCIETY IN THE UK HAD GOT TO THIS POINT WHERE PEOPLE FELT THAT THE ONLY RECOURSE THEY HAD WAS TO TAKE ACTION IN THE STREETS. WE COULD INVESTIGATE THE RESONANCE THESE EVENTS HAD FOR JERRY DAMMERS LIVING IN A MIXED-RACE MIDLANDS TOWN LIKE COVENTRY AT THAT TIME. WE COULD ASK WHY MODERN ARCHITECTURE IS FAILING US AND PRODUCING UNINHABITABLE 'CONCRETE JUNGLES' (ANOTHER SPECIAL AKA SONG). BUT, OF COURSE, TV DOESN'T GET ANYWHERE NEAR THESE REALITIES. AS FAR AS THEY'RE CONCERNED, THE ONLY 'REASON' WHY THE RIOTS IN THE UK HAPPENED AT ALL IS SO THAT THE SPECIALS COULD MAKE A SONG ABOUT IT AND GO ON TELEVISION'S *TOP OF THE POPS* TO PERFORM IT.

EVERYTHING THAT HAPPENS IN
THE WORLD, HAPPENS SIMPLY TO

MAKE MORE TELEVISION. IS THIS A
HEALTHY SITUATION?

WHAT I URGE YOU TO DO IS THE FOLLOWING:

TURN OFF THE TELEVISION AS FREQUENTLY AS POSSIBLE. YOU'LL FEEL BETTER IMMEDIATELY. BETTER YET, TAKE A LEAF FROM CHARLES HAYWARD'S BOOK, AND GET RID OF THE DAMN THING ALTOGETHER.

USE YOUR OWN MEMORY AND IMAGINATION TO RECALL WHAT REALLY HAPPENED, AND MEANT SOMETHING, TO YOU IN THE 1970S AND 1980S, AND DON'T ACCEPT TV'S VERSION OF IT. THEY ARE TRYING TO SELL US A BILL OF GOODS, MAKING US PAY THROUGH THE NOSE FOR THEIR WATERED-DOWN, INEFFECTUAL AND FALSE VERSION OF SOMETHING WHICH IS

ALREADY OURS.

RECLAIM POP MUSIC (ALL MUSIC) FROM THE HANDS OF THESE SHALLOW, UNINFORMED, MANIPULATIVE MEDIA HUCKSTERS. IT'S OUR MUSIC, AND WE WILL MAKE IT MEAN WHAT WE WANT IT TO MEAN.

ED PINSENT 2001

Record Retailers, Artists, Distributors and Labels please take note:

A common lament I hear from readers is that they CANNOT FIND THE RECORDS AND CDS reviewed in this magazine. They want to listen, but they are frustrated. If your product is invisible or impossible to get, then what value does it have?

Detailed Picture Credits this issue:

IAN MIDDLETON - Sun Ra (22-24), Atoms of Pure Noise (10), Discurator's Den (114-115), Voice Crack (60-61)

RIK RAWLING - illoes for his own section (54, 58)

ALASDAIR WILLIS - No Probable Purpose (89, 92), Very Special Nothing Music (84-87), Universal Minimalism (67). Also decorations on pages 15, 29, 96, 125, 138

SCOTT STEVENS - pages 6, 48 and 76

MIGUEL TOMASIN - pages 43, 45, 56, 75

ANLA COURTIS - pages 56 (b), 94

MONCHO CONZALO - pages 41-42, 44, 46, 56 (t)

HARLEY RICHARDSON - illustrates DISCURATOR'S DEN COMPILATIONS (133-137)

IAN GYPSY SHERRED - illustrates LACONIC LOBSTERS (62-63)

CHARLES HAYWARD - drawings in his interview (104, 106, 108, 111), some of which were 'jammed' with EP

SHAUN ROBERT - illoes for his own section (33-35), SEA OF BLISS (117) and SKIPLOAD OF TAPES (131)

STAN BATCOW - page 132

JASON McLEAN - page 32 (from cover of CELO 001)

ED PINSENT - all other uncredited ink drawings and collages; all photos for Hilmar section

Photos of Reynolds, Voice Crack, Sun Ra and Koji Asano were found on the web. Sincere APOLOGIES if I have violated copyright.

Mutating into a

M=I=C=R=O=C=H=I=P

Fennesz

03_02_00: Live at Revolver, Melbourne

UNITED KINGDOM TOUCH TO:CDR3 CD (2000)

Christian Fennesz boots it up live in a short concert extract. I saw the MEGO 'package' tour last year at the South Bank Centre. Gotta tell ya, Fennesz turned in a pretty brill performance (after he fixed a loose connection problem), his sounds spitting out much vigour and spirit, but I will make one observation. From the way he took the stage, and particularly from the way he left it, he looked like an overworked man who'd just turned up in a taxi and was about to be whisked off to another airport, fly to another international venue, and go through exactly the same performance.

All of which, of course, is perfectly true. Now, I'm not here to ring the death knell for laptoppers. The idea of packing lots of ideas and sounds into a tiny space (ie the laptop computer) does have its appeal, as does the idea of a musician washing around the circuit of international venues with ease, like a virus in the bloodstream. But if the musician (through jet-lag, tiredness or sheer boredom) leaves his brain at home on the night of the gig, then is there any point to making an appearance at all? I'm still old-fashioned – I'm not asking for the return of the guitar hero, but there has to be *some* performative element for me, even if it's just in the way he moves and clicks his mouse. Yes, I suppose I'll settle for that small degree of human interaction.

Then there's the question of the environment making a change to the music. I suppose I'm as much as saying that it doesn't seem to matter where the laptopper brings his device, the performance will remain the same. There are, I know, those who adopt a different view. Judge for yourself whether the circumstances of the live venue from Melbourne, Australia, have fed into Fennesz's work here, or whether he enjoyed his meetings with fellow players Martin Ng, Mark from Synaesthesia, or Oren Ambarchi, the organizer of the What is Music festival (all of whom are named on the sleeve). This short piece IS brilliant music, its abrasive, layered sounds building up to an ending which can only be called 'effervescent'. Like a glass of champagne, not a glass of Liver Salts. Fennesz chooses his samples carefully, gives you a lot to listen to, and is concerned with arranging blocks of sound within a meaningful pattern; therefore his music always has clarity, direction and a strong dynamic. A hard, crystalline beauty.

ED PINSENT

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Ambarchi / Pimmon / Fennesz / Rehberg / Rowe

Afternoon Tea

FRANCE RITORNELL CD RIT14 (2000)

Our august and venerable editor says we must keep an eye on this fella Oren Ambarchi (see TSP #8, p 73) and as I happen to live in the same city as Oren along with over 3 million other souls, I suppose the onerous task falls on my shoulders... Reporting that in February 2000, the subject



in question rounded up fellow Sydneysider Pimmon and three visiting musicians who were in Australia as part of the Whatismusic? shebang for a computer/guitar improvisation session and *Afternoon Tea* is the result.

On offer are two unnamed tracks totalling over 40 minutes of music. The musicians effortlessly pass the baton among themselves, regardless of who's on and how many people are playing at any one time, so the music continues to flow at a steady and sometimes cracking pace - and the ear is fooled into thinking it's hearing some highly structured pieces. The first piece starts with an almost imperceptible Keith Rowe, who seems to be testing the depths of this particular collaboration (I know he has played with some of these people before), followed by someone on computer and then by Ambarchi weighing with eerie, bell-like tones; meanwhile, deep rumblings in the

background steadily come to the fore giving the piece a driving momentum while other noises weave and duck about - ripples abound, guitars chime and tones float. A sequence of high-pitched, toy-like computer sounds decisively finish off this piece.

The 2nd track is a more amorphous beast and takes longer to find itself and gain an identity; it's harder to tell who's doing what and who's slacking off. There's a lot happening that's easily missed - you definitely need to turn up the volume to catch it all. Gurgling guitar gives way to gurgling sea monster sounds about the 14th minute and one soon has the impression of being borne

by the squeaks, burbles and chatters into a primordial, amniotic sea around the 16th to 18th minute - gentle, warm, soothing computer music then carries us for much of the rest of the track (24 minutes in length). Not as direct or as purposeful perhaps as its predecessor but very atmospheric and intricate, moving at its own languid pace, the piece requires and rewards repeated listening. Come to think of it, so does the whole CD.

Others may stuff themselves senseless on biscuits and cakes for afternoon tea; TSP readers will check out *Afternoon Tea*; me, I've decided to keep an eye instead on someone's vast and extensive movie video and laserdisc library with its own take on afternoon tea: I know he has *Bunman* aka *The Untold Story* and I'm hoping he knows of *Delicatessen*, 301/302 and Kei Fujiwara's *Organ...*

JENNIFER HOR (28/12/2000)

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Lasse Marhaug Nothing But Sound From Now On

NORWAY SMALLTOWN
SUPERSOUND STS047CD CD (2001)

An electrifying release from this Norwegian solo artist. He adopts an approach midway between Merzbau and the Mego label at its wackiest and most abrasive (think Pita's *Get Out* and General Magic's *Rechenkonig*) and like them has switched over to a computer to deliver music. He has an impressive range at his fingertips, veering wildly from shock-tactic maximal noise, to near-silent contemplative drones rather in the F López 'style'. Much of the time this is loud and noisy as you'd expect from the Norwegian noisenik but he is also playful and even quiet, wintry and respectful of space and silence. His opening strategy is to jolt you awake with a barrage of startling edits, loud and

brutal fragments clashing together with the rapid-fire micro-blip changes which are only possible with digital technology. Yet each volcanic shard is razor sharp, crystal clear, and for the most part identifiable, so a lazy lack of definition is not this man's game. You can hear a voice pause to take a breath in between more familiar samples such as TV voices, loud dance records, and industrial noise. The relationships are arbitrary, and there's no intent to communicate anything ironic or clever through juxtaposition. Nothing but sound. His noise and shock methods here locate him in the company of Merzbow (with whom he's worked) and Otomo Yoshihide, although the latter doesn't 'do' shock any more...

The album calms down after this initial assault and proceeds with a series of foreboding drone-scapes, but far from the 'Ambient' school, these are overlaid with far more interesting details so that the ear is never bored for very long. Some cuts feature passages of almost minimal noise or sounds that take your breath away with their pure and streamlined tone. Although, as indicated, Marhaug's range of sounds isn't particularly original, the way he deploys them is extremely interesting. One might almost discern a 'narrative' within his frameworks, albeit of a very fractured and perplexing sort. Certainly, there's an intelligence and discrimination driving each episode, and a real commitment to the hard craft of arrangement, so lacking in the work of many. This is not some self-indulgent wallow in the assorted pig-sties of noise which are available to the sampling-laptop mixer these days. The seventh track in particular (all tracks are untitled) is a beautiful, meandering piece of sound with a jagged edge, very icy and sombre, with a chugging rhythm beneath. Perhaps the title suggests a bleak future (or a happy future, even) where all regular forms of communication have broken down and the world is filled with nothing but sound. How might we evolve and adapt to this strange situation? Perhaps by using sound as a new language.

ED PINSNET / JENNIFER HOR

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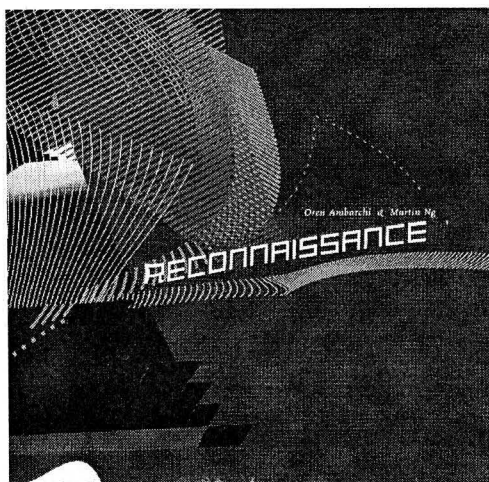
Various Artists

Micromusic.Net /

Micro_Superstarz_2000

SWITZERLAND DOMIZIL 12 CD (2000)

I've never been one for computer games, preferring to use my TV monitor to view yet another Terence Fisher Hammer video. But I'd be an ostrich's cousin to doubt their gigantic popularity. Playstation, Dreamcast and their relations are nearly as inescapable as Geri Halliwell's beaming mush. So it was inevitable that young electronic musicians would sooner or later plunder the sound files of their prized consoles to process some related micro-music. That's exactly what's been happening online at micromusic.net in the last eighteen months. This website describes itself as 'an

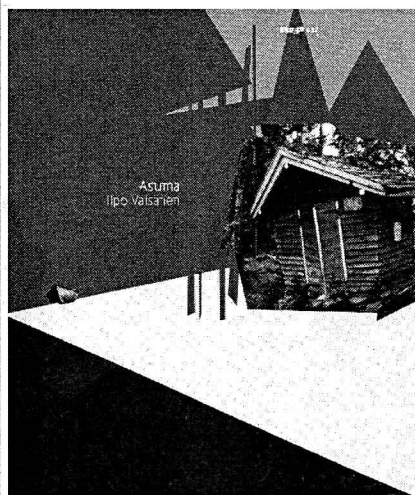


underground sound community, a digital lifestyle platform for screen-kidz, joystick lovers and audio Nerds'. The CD Micro-Superstarz_2000 compiles the most interesting tracks submitted by those, ahem, joystick lovers during the Millennium year. Before listening, and while clocking the ultra-bright pixelated cover graphics, I feared an irritating high-frequency assault from a thousand amplified Nintendos piloted by tykes in baseball caps. Only a retreat with some enclosed Carmelites would relieve the anticipated migraine.

Surprisingly the thing turns out to be a minor delight, and considering all the pieces were produced on PCs using the aforementioned console-game samples, incredibly diverse. The micromusic experience is like being left alone in a sweet shop to dip into each colourful jar, every blast of refined sugar making you want to sample another digital gumdrop. The emphasis is on the short and upbeat, and honourable mention has to go to Carl's 'Last Ninja' with its irresistible cheesy oriental melody, Psioldmputer's evolving beefy grooves, and Jerohme's hurtling contribution which crams in enough spastic break-beats to induce a serious fit. Inevitably the disc includes a micromusic PC game and 14,000 Commodore 64 sounds, which I'd guess is an open invitation to do-it-yourself and join the fllowship of audio Nerds.

JOHN BAGNALL

www.micromusic.net



Oren Ambarchi and Martin Ng

Reconnaissance

GERMANY STAUBGOLD 15 CD (2001)

A very simple record, composed of extremely clear, ringing high tones which overlap and drift into each other like expanding, rippling circles as they slowly sound and fade. For some reason I thought this was done on a laptop, but I can't find the evidence for that now. Oren is the Australian guitar maestro and experimenter whose work I much enjoy, while fellow Sydney-sider Martin Ng is an electronicist who has worked with Hiaz Gmachi out of Farmer's Manual. Unlike our friends General Magic who like to laugh at the past, and unlike some Laptop-Louies who seem to deny that history even exists outside of the last ten minutes, this redoubtable duo want to plug themselves into an entire history of minimalism with their *Reconnaissance* work. On this occasion, they connect this piece very strongly with the Sonic Arts Union and with 'Eastern and Western minimalist traditions'. A grand success; not only is this a piece *large* enough to lose yourself in, it is also one of the warmest pieces of electronic music I've heard this year. They find the human voices in amongst the bytes, and use them to set up a plaintive but dignified wailing. Gorgeous.

ED PINSNET

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Ilpo Väisänen

Asuma

AUSTRIA MEGO 037 CD (2001)

A solo effort from Ilpo, notable as member of Pan Sonic with Mika Vanio, proving his talent is far from negligible. This is a very grainy, gritty and aggressive fierce electric noise, sometimes hammered home with punchy beats - a combo that's just perfect for Suicide fans. It's often very busy and filled with growling tones and mean drones. 'Asumaton' has the most power, its strong and loud helicopter drone augmented by anxiety attacks, created by some high-note organ cluster stabs. Unlike some Megos, this release isn't cut-up nor fragmented by the whims of a mouse-wielding laptop merchant. Ilpo favours long duration, and he sticks with a sound he likes once he's nailed it down. Unfortunately, he has no real idea how to develop it, so most of these pieces are formless and remain rather flat. They only conclude by fading out. Overall then, a disappointing record, let down by too many ordinary sounds, few ideas, and a rather drab neutrality.

Another 'nature' photograph type cover, depicting fir trees and a log cabin against a jokey mountainside cutout; so far this issue I've seen quite a few sleeves in this vein, including on records by Voice Crack, C-Schulz, Hazard, Koji Asano, Peter Cusack, Jonathan Coleclough, Francisco Lopez, and every other sleeve done by Jon Wozencroft.

Some of them are attempting to say something about the music. Others, as in this instance, are making a slightly sarcastic off-beat remark, putting harsh digital noise inside a travel-brochure type cover. Witty.

ED PINSENT

www.mego.at

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Fennesz / Rosy Parlane
Live

AUSTRALIA SYNAESTHESIA SYN001
3"CD (2000)

What's most striking about this live collaboration of laptop computer and minimalist electronica is the difference in mood and structure of the two unnamed tracks here. The 1st track has a turbulent, dynamic force thanks to a repeating loop that ebbs back and forth over amorphous background tones; one thinks of a large and thick tumbleweed bowling about in a desert where now and again a wind whips up fine dust over the ground surface. The 2nd track is a serene and stately affair in which the repetition of deep, thick and rich subterranean sounds holds up a series of noise effects applied in a sparing manner which enables the listener to savour the computer-generated effects fully. This track is perhaps the better of the two due to its spacious atmosphere and rich texture.

The recording took place at Synaesthesia's retail outlet when this was based in Prahran, an inner-city suburb in Melbourne. I understand there was a space above the shop that could be used for live performances and this was probably where Fennesz and Parlane's collaboration took place. Now that the Syn shop has moved into the city itself, I'm not sure if it'll still host in-store live performances. Anyway, *Live* is a very worthy first release for Synaesthesia, even if I can't imagine Mark Harwood (chief Synner and recipient of my mail orders and other brain-dead e-mails) as a cigar-chewing, beer-bellied record label exec ...

JENNIFER HOR

www.synrecords.com

Uli Troyer
Nok

AUSTRIA MEGO 039 3" CD (2000)

Cute if twee music for little multi-eyed alien tourists who get lost at the beach or crash-land in the Sahara with a load of cameras and film and after stumbling around in searing heat for an hour, realise there's not much beyond sand, sky and the occasional date palm to take photos of. *Nok* isn't anywhere near the lofty Himalayan heights scaled by Fennesz, Pita and that Hecker remix CD, but if you don't mind hearing geeky mouse-clicking stuff which only lasts 18 minutes anyway, there some good moments. On tracks 4 and 5 one imagines the Nok creature unwittingly aiding a couple of bank robbers, getting caught up in a high-speed police car chase and just managing to escape the six-car pile-up and

the long arm of the law back into its spaceship and home.

Troyer was wise to release *Nok* as a 3"CD, rather than stretch the concept for longer than 30 minutes; the music isn't that great and even the sleeve design by Troyer and Tina Frank doesn't compare with Frank's designs for other people's CDs.

JENNIFER HOR

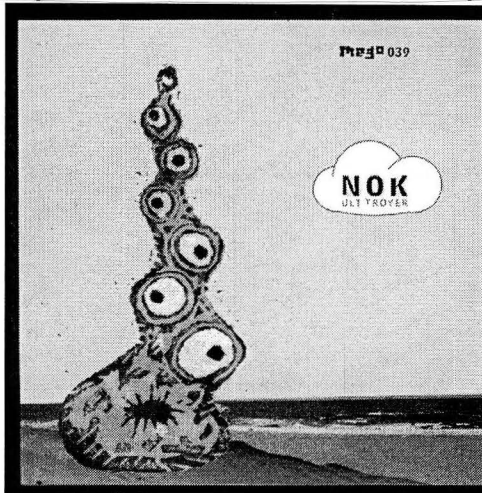
www.mego.at

General Magic Rechenkonig

AUSTRIA MEGO 032 CD (2000)

Ah, what amusing fellows these Viennese are, as they load digital snapshots of the world into their laptops and use lightpens to draw moustaches all over them. General Magic on their fab new full-length recording kick off with a jokey computer voice intoning 'I LOVE YOU' on a stuck loop, while the backing 'muzak' is almost a parody of all that is sentimental and slushy in popular music of the last 50 years. So much for the love song, then....maybe GM are disowning the past and sneering at it from the security of their laptop screens. Hit a delete button, and years of history can be wiped from the hard drive.

Composed I think mainly of witty samples of other records, beats and melodies, the record jumps about from one idea to another like a restless kangaroo with athlete's foot. At times this fragmentation makes for fairly difficult listening, but not that bad. I mean, it's nowhere near as challenging



as the austere Hecker, whose dry-as-dust tones on MEGO are not only tough on the lugs, but they remain lodged in your nervous system permanently thereafter, like indigestible fishbones stuck in the gullet. GM are a lot more 'fun'. After a few spins you find you can reconstruct these apparently random glitches and buzzes into the semblance of a tune. One way to do it is to mentally hum a tune of your own, while listening. The GM background of fizzes and crackles will, amazingly, fit in quite well with the tune in your head, proving the value of such an exercise.

Another possibility is that each ditty here started out as a programmed instrumental

pop-tune, replete with rich string samples and vocal refrains, only to be chopped apart in the innards of the PowerMac by the General Magicians, and spewed out as this malarkey-fest. The listener is then faced with reconstructing an impossible double-sided jigsaw. Some pieces here can almost soar into a fine melange of digitally-effaced cocktail-lounge jazz mixed with a dose of Pearl & Dean music, only to suddenly run out of steam at the end and melt down into a meaningless chatter of clicks and wheezes. This is like a Japanese friction-motor toy, brightly coloured plastic shell on top, which runs around for a few minutes and brings joy to the child, then falls over to reveal a pair of cog-driven wheels spinning in neutral, before the motor winds down.

26 short tracks with I think largely meaningless titles - which are typeset lengthwise to form a brilliant piece of absurdist concrete poetry. Sleeve wrapped in the sort of graphics which, I suspect, are set to become dated fairly shortly - computer-printed dash & dot characters, overlaid on circuit diagrams. But look - lurking somewhere is a portrait of two guys, perhaps General Magic themselves, when they were babies.

ED PINSENT

www.mego.at

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Zbigniew Karkowski
It

AUSTRIA MEGO 027 3"CD (2000)

Mini-CDs are an ideal format with which to acquaint yourself with an uncompromising artist like Zbigniew Karkowski. I don't know a great deal about him apart from observing that he is or was a member of The Hafler Trio, once took summer music lessons from the very late and great Iannis Xenakis, and has lived in Japan since the mid-1990s. (I'm sure I scored two out of three in that statement.) From what I have heard of his music, Karkowski's way is low-key minimalist yet insistent, and at the same time meditative and concentrated, as if every note was bursting with concentrated energy.

This is an eerie piece to listen to - there may be a field recording in there looped over and over again until the sound of night crickets reverberates within the skull. High and low sounds alternate and sometimes overlap throughout the

17-minute track, and Karkowski demonstrates fine restraint and balance. If you do not know Karkowski's solo and collaborative work and you are looking for something that will absorb all your attention in less than 20 minutes, this is a fine CD to start with.

The sleeve and the pattern on the disk itself were designed by Tina Franks's Skot.

JENNIFER HOR

www.mego.at

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ATOMS OF PURE

N-O-I-S-E

all-out synth mayhem, their brand of noise is far more passionate, more involved than the dry stutterings of a thousand desiccated laptops. This CD is realised with grace and skill through processing original synthesizer tracks, which are extensively remixed, treated and layered with subtle effects. The 7 tracks are named after various stages in the day's occupations and necessities, thus suggesting it should be listened to while carrying out these quotidian tasks; 'Swimming', 'Shopping', 'Walking' and so forth would all carry extra meanings when this kind of deadly vibration is serving as your soundtrack, believe me. Superb package too, a cross between a greetings-card and an electrical component in a utility bag...a jolly send-up of consumer products.

If music is a curative for your physical ailments, this is a broad-band anti-biotic. It gets straight to the heart of the matter, cutting through unnecessary flab like a surgical laser beam. If listened to with a good pair of headphones, this 'healing' approach is demonstrated with total clarity; you can imagine your brain is full of malignant blood clots, and the high-pitched sounds are working overtime to destroy the cancerous cells. And won't you feel better when the anesthetic wears off!

ED PINSENT

Ackerstrasse 150/151, 10115, Berlin, Germany

Otomo Yoshihide /

Voice Crack

Bits, Bots and Signs

USA ERSTWHILE RECORDS 011 CD
(2000)

A superb 'prize fight' documented on CD, this pitches Japanese 'Vinyl Tranquilizer' man Otomo Yoshihide against the Swiss experimentalists Voice Crack, a duo comprising Norbert Möslang and Andy Guhl. Voice Crack are important veterans of the noise mode, active since 1972, although their work isn't always easy to come by. They first creased my ears when they jammed with Borbetomagus, on the astonishing *Fish That Sparkling Bubble LP*, one of the more extreme sandpaper-to-the-forehead noise records which I have in the house (it is also extremely useful as a stain remover). There, they played their famous 'cracked everyday electronics', selecting what they would from their tables of detritus and junk to give those roaring Americans a good competition.

Here, in a set of studio works recorded in Switzerland in year 2000, the Crackers speak warmly of how they felt they'd been playing with Otomo all their lives. Their rapport certainly is amazing, and it's quite different to most improvised music records where the musicians like to make a point of 'talking to each other' through their playing. Otomo and VC don't exactly ignore each other completely, but neither do they lapse into that rather corny 'call and response' formula that can deaden improv. Instead, these recordings are built up by labourers, intensely concentrating on their individual tasks.

So it isn't exactly a clash of the noise titans; I

ナーブ
ネット
ノイズ

was kinda surprised how subtle this record is. It still bludgeons, but the truncheon is rubber instead of steel. Each piece has a subdued energy, like a Siberian tiger sleeping in the snow. The musicians work with blocks of noise, freely blending clean tones with dirty tones, rubbing them together and creating friction. They work with muffled noises, triggered samples, whistles and whines, mobile phones from Hell...the distinct separation of the sounds is remarkable - none of that murky grey mess that results from the efforts of lesser folk who flounder in the swamps of feedback and radio interference. In these three-dimensional scapes, there are transparent layers of noise simply floating and spinning, huge sheets of electric activity spiralling in a controlled free-fall descent. The listener is suspended quite comfortably in a giant boiling vat, while the musicians add in vegetables, live animals, chemicals, spices,

Nerve Net Noise

Various Amusements

GERMANY HRÖNIR HRCD07 CD
(2001)

'Amusement' is the least of what you derive from this excellent full-length release by this Japanese noise duo, Tsuyoshi Nakamura and Hiroshi Kumakiri. They create an intense and somewhat claustrophobic environment with this record, its very abstraction suggesting a severe hermeticism, which has a bizarre fascination. The players exist in some mid-range point between the full-on extremes of the Masonna / Merzbow zone, and the harsh digital treatments of Mego. Though they lack the...erm... 'organic' benefits that derive from full-volume screeching or

and other surprises...another must-purchase item from Erstwhile.

ED PINSENT

www.erstwhilerecords.com

Guilty Connector

Different Water

JAPAN USU TAPES CD UT-15 (2001)

Billed as 'Non-Stop Grind Harsh', this recording revolves around the theme of flowing water. At least, the title track does: lots of flowing water starting off very quietly and gradually getting louder until you're drowning in the turbulent waves. A relatively pleasant way to begin a CD! Thereafter, it's truly Non-Stop Grind Harsh all the way. Guilty Connector aka Kohei Nakagawa is staking his claim to be the next God of Japanese Noise. And it's full-on noise at that, shot through with a cheeky sense of toilet humour; GC's approach is certainly not subtle, but he sure is having a good time at our expense. He incorporates found sounds and field recordings, some of which come from a bedroom, into the tracks - on 'Piss Factory' and 'Xeno Phonogram', the flushing and dribbling noises of a toilet merge seamlessly into the cacophony. On other tracks you can hear motors purring and planes flying overhead. On 'Xeno Phonogram', GC throws in all manner of unrelated field recordings: a man coughing; the ambience of someone throwing a fishing line into a river; a metal bin being bashed; and the voices of an African choir. Oh yes, and those toilet noises too.

Fortunately for our ears (and for those needing a toilet break), this CD runs for about 34 minutes. Just as well as the music

The Sound 9projector Ninth Issue 2001

starts to get unfocussed towards the end, and the attack is relentless - almost to the point of tedium. One day GC may learn to control the dynamics of his music by adding some quiet time amongst the nuclear blasts, and varying his plan of attack. We don't really need to be hit with sonic car crashes again and again and again when we're already flat out on the ground like schnitzelised roadkill from previous auto encounters.

On the other hand, if you really enjoy being punished, GC has released other recordings on cassette (including a joint recording with an act called Continuous Orgasm), all described as Extreme Harsh or Harsh Noise. Don't say you weren't warned!

JENNIFER HOR

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Putrefier

Simulated Vapours

UNITED KINGDOM HARBINGER
SOUND 009 VINYL LP (1999)

Yaargh! This vinyl mess is strong enough to give you a dose of the 'vapours', let alone simulate 'em! A sluggish but ultimately fascinating noise from this UK solo noise-nik. On his two side-long suites, 'Biotapestry under Fire' and 'Lummox Hydrolocks', he delivers a scalding combo of explosions, earthquakes, tidal waves and electric storms. Samples and tapes are fragmented - well, more than that, they're utterly smashed to smithereens and reduced to total debris - then fed into a black sea of feedback, power electronics, delay effects, and harsh grating tones. Putrefier is Mark Durgan, a UK musician active since 1986, but somehow overlooked in amongst all the stiff competition. The Harbinger Sound label aims to correct this balance, and Steve Underwood has accordingly staged live shows with Putrefier alongside Japanese noise-meisters ThirdOrgan (with whom he's collaborated on record), Government Alpha, MSBR, and Astro. Putrefier has a few releases to his name, including early cassettes *Beyond Scathing* and *Cog Dominance*. This - his first vinyl LP release - is housed in a lurid full colour sleeve, mostly bright vermilion in hue, depicting a gruesome photo-collage of steel bands, car crashes, and nasty insects. This might lead some customers to draw the wrong conclusions, because this music is far from repellent.

ED PINSENT

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Maldoror

She

USA IPECAC RECORDINGS IPC-3 CD
[2000]

It starts with rainwater dripping through a hole in the ceiling while a Bugs Bunny cartoon plays in the room next door...and quickly degenerates into exactly what you'd

expect from a collaboration between Mike Patton (ex-Faith No More) and Masami Akita (Merzbow).

It seems that Patton's stint at covering for Yamantaka Eye during the Naked City live shows had a profound influence on him, first by taking Faith No More into ever-increasingly bizarre and fan-alienating territory ('Jizzlobber', for example) and then by ditching the band altogether to concentrate on Mr.Bungle, Fantomas and all the other projects he's determined to be involved in. His Tzadik album *Adult Themes For Voice* demonstrated just how far he was willing to take his ideas (sounding not unlike



Masonna on Valium) and, on this release on his own Ipecac label, we find him displaying even further disdain for the typical recorded music experience.

Merzbow we know plenty about, and it's fair to say that the two guys work well together, though it's hard to say who's really influencing who. Much of Akita's trademark thunder has been tempered by Patton's hoots and squawks, perverted chuckles and sinister echoing laughter, while Patton's fondness for jarring stylistic jumpcuts has been held in check by Akita's inclination to the sustained signal - be it a metallic howl or a sample of poodle rock guitar wanking stretched to infinity...and beyond.

Lovingly packaged in pink and adorned with illustrations celebrating the beauty of the female form (from the likes of Italian soft-porn cartoonist Milo Manara) it has the whiff of schoolboy romance about it, albeit with the oh-so-necessary yang of adolescent perversity and fascination with 'the flesh' festering just under the surface. Not that any woman I can think of would be wooed by these lilting strains - this is more of an admission that our dreams of Eros lie in the same sheets we soil with our priapic discharges.

Readers should make no great inference from the project's name - swiped from the

Lautremont novel of surrealist brutality and perversion - this really is just two guys having a whale of a time. Clocking in at just over half an hour it's the ideal soundtrack to your next wank over cartoon porno sluts, and I'm sure Mike and Masami would be flattered by such a response. So go on, give them a hand, it's the least you can do.

RIK RAWLING 23/04/2001

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K K Null

GeV

THE NETHERLANDS STAALPLAAT
STCD 039 CD (2000)

For those of you familiar with the UK duo Techno Animal and their offshoot project The Sidewinder (not to be confused with an Australian rock act called Sidewinder), K K Null's *GeV* may seem superficially similar to the CD *Colonised* released under The Sidewinder name a few years ago. Like that particular recording where there were over 20 tracks of looped rhythm textures, and titles with a science fiction theme, *GeV* consists of 17 mostly short pieces of looped or chopped samples, all untitled, but so inhuman, sinister and futuristic that had Null given them titles, these would all have to be a mixture of science fiction and future horror themes! The original samples may be fairly ordinary, but Mr Null turns them into highly intense pieces, thanks to relentless repetition and other techniques pushed to their utmost. Tracks 7, 10 and 14 in particular are highly mesmerising and fluid, the sonic equivalent of toxic industrial effluent; track 11 has a deeply brooding and sinister atmosphere; and track 17 takes the repetition and cutting up of samples (there's something that sounds a bit like a jet engine in there) into an extreme realm of hellish noise washes and scratches.

It's the variation in mood on *GeV* and Mr Null's tendency to force sounds and techniques as far as they will go that elevate this CD high above similar recordings of looped samples and textures. Well, you know Mr Null isn't one to choose a middle path; everything he does seems to merit the 'extreme' tag! (I vaguely recall hearing one recording he did for a compilation CD years ago which sounded like 2 slabs of concrete grinding against each other.) There's also a clarity and needle-like precision in the production that further amplifies the sinister and demoniacal nature of the music on 'GeV'.

The CD's artwork by Seldon Hunt is no less remarkable than the music; the cover suggests hidden devils and fantastic creatures hidden within electronic circuitry, all awaiting Mr Null's commands ... he's got quite a menagerie in there ... so buy *GeV* and help Mr Null with his pets' food bills.

JENNIFER HOR

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Silent Block

#1

FRANCE KHOKHOT K201 CD (2000)

Here's a report from the Noisy Electric Village - sounds promising, eh? This one's kind of an 'arty' noise, I suppose, but who's counting when you have a lump of oatmeal-noise as solid as *this* to get your teeth into? Right from the kick-off, you know you're at home with a meaty slab of prime-rump racket that is accompanied perfectly by a side order of hot salty French fries, mushrooms with garlic and olive oil, fresh white bread with Normandy butter, and a fine Burgundy. The gourmets here are three French guys, Xavier Charles, Jérôme Jeanmart and Frédéric Le Junter, plus buddy Stéphane Levigneront who does the live mix on stage. They formed the 'band' in 1997 at the Musiques Action festival in France, and make this ungodly racket from their home-made instruments. Aside from one blurry photo of these arty goons gathered around a table-load of unidentifiable junk and clutter, I can provide no further clues, although there is a photo of some bedsprings on the cover (the Freak Brothers used the bedsprings of a mattress for their one and only attempt at rock music, so this clearly has a worthy tradition). Besides the home-made gadgets, there are toys, drum machines, 'sound machines', vibrating surfaces, string and wind instruments, a prepared bass, and prepared CDs. A rustic charm results; you get the same sort of warm glow as if some retarded old farmer were proudly showing you the workings of the new mangel-wurzel contraption he'd made out of an old plough and four tins of boot polish. In fact, that's exactly how the record sounds, too.

Like Borbetomagus, the players come to each performance free from preconceived ideas, don't play compositions and go for the all-out spontaneous improvisation approach. With the amplification and the energy, they are (also like the Borbs) closer to rock music than they are to free improv, and admit that freely. I like the idea that they sit a table facing each other when they do it, as this makes it seem like they're sitting down together at a meal, breaking the bread, pouring the wine, bonding. The simple act of eating together may not seem like much to you, but even an anti-social git like myself remains persuaded that this is one of the few

effective things that can bond together the family, friends, society in general. In Britain, the first country of the neurotic and introverted nuclear family, and the first country of terrible home-cooked food, we tend to neglect this activity, and sit miserably in McDonalds ignoring each other, brooding, starting fights. In Italy, the first country of the outgoing extended family, and of great cuisine too, they tend to celebrate the dinner table as a nucleus of familial energy. For further details on this, and the magic properties of the hearth and cooking stove, I direct you to Piero Camporesi's *The Magic Harvest* (Polity Press). For a sumptuous feed of original grinding and whirring noises, I direct you to

this CD.

ED PINSENT

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Agog

Dust Is Their Food and Clay Their Meat

USA ANOMALOUS RECORDS NOM 5 VINYL LP [2001]

Wonderful record - it's virtually the Quay Brothers in sound! I'm reluctant to go anywhere near that over-used term 'organic' when describing music, but this particular pail of lunacy seems to have been born right out of the compost heap, so fecund and radical are its rich odours. Perhaps it might be more accurate to describe the activities of creatures born half in the earth, half in a junkyard. Hearing these chaotic and quirky noises, one envisions just such a hybrid beast picking its way carefully through mountains of fresh garbage in some semi-industrial wasteland. The monster breathes, mutters, and continues on its path collecting broken pieces, making noises by scraping on metal plates, plucking the spokes of a bicycle-wheel harp, and rattling old tin cans like percussion. He lives in a crumbling ruin. He's a friendly old troll, this eater of dust and clay, but his purpose on this sphere remains obscure.

Agog is Damian Bisciglia, a cassette-veteran from the early 1980s who was at one time loosely connected with the LA Free Music Society. He has also recorded as Points Of Friction. He creates his unique brand of rickety-rackety rodomontade with an array of completely non-musical objects, which he constructs out of everyday objects, then finds innovative ways to play them using conventional methods like bowing, breathing, and plucking. Determined to make these unlikely assemblages work, he eschews all electronic effects other than the trusty contact mic - which can transform even the smallest gesture into a sound-event packed with interest. He also uses the mic as an 'instrument unto itself', and shows talent for organising his chaos by using multitracked tape loops. This rec has extremely quirky, uncanny qualities. The idiosyncratic gestures of a man translated directly, without much

mediation, into finely-crafted and strangely detailed noise. The project is abetted by the collaged titles, such as 'Rubbing Doll Combs Together to Make Music for Pillow Insects', a naming which embodies the technique as much as the content. The troll's crumbling ruin has become a new dwelling. Move in. Make dust your food, and clay your meat.

For a recent interview with Bisciglia, see issue 15 of *Bananafish* magazine (USA) which also reproduces photos of some of his sculptures.

ED PINSENT

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pANICSTEPPER

agro jazz

UNITED KINGDOM FLO RECORDS FLO013 CD (2001)

If we can have 'intelligent drum and bass', why can't we have 'intelligent Merzbow'? That's to say, despite all the articles, the rave reviews, the Merzbox, I generally find the experience of listening to Merzbow disappointing. Take his 'jazz' album, *Door Open at 8 am*. A great idea on the face of it, but after the opening minutes of each track's take on obliterating a jazz sample with feedback I lose interest. But what has all this to do with pANICSTEPPER? S/he might not like this, but with this - her/his 'jazz' album - s/he fulfills my notion of what 'intelligent Merzbow' should be. Pieces are crafted from the exploded fragments of classic jazz tracks - new rhythm sections pieced together, looped, varispeeded, distorted: a string bass tussles with two alien sets of trap drums - a monstrous organ (as it were) shocks both into submission.

pANICSTEPPER also creates drum and bass and techno rhythms, through which treated jazz samples and Pro Tools electronics, crash and burn. There's a magnificent sequence in the early stages of this 75+ minutes CD that shows off the skills to best effect: beginning with a dedication to Roland Kirk, we move to almost-free electronics battle with Derek Bailey's overwrought electric guitar (the immaculately-titled 'If you can't handle the guitar, stay at home' - and for once, I think Derek comes out worse).

We then move to 'Grind Zero', a breakdown of beats and acid synth that refuses to shape up and make sense. Above all, this is gripping stuff - I don't feel (as I so often do with Merzbow) that I deserve a medal for sitting through it. pANICSTEPPER ain't easy, mind - in its own way it's as deliriously unpleasant as some of the best noise-makers, but there's an intelligence at work here amid all the mayhem, blurring and bashing. There's even the odd tune, for goodness' sake. At times you feel like there's a techno classic struggling to break free, but I for one am pleased it stays imprisoned. What pANICSTEPPER has to offer is worth any number of dancefloor fillers.

CHRIS ATTON

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Voice Crack

Shock_Late

THE NETHERLANDS ETENPFUHL
EMM LP 06 VINYL LP (2000)

Time is fleeting, the hour is late, so now's the time to investigate these famous Swiss experimentalists who create the most goldarned *human* manifestation of noise within the entire European mainland today. This rek has a few affinities with early Merzbow, about the time of *Pornoise 1kg*, when he too favoured the use of violent synth swooping attacks along with tape loops forming a thumping drive rhythm. But Voice Crack's smorgasbord of smoochy smut is a lot more manageable than the 'Duke of Din', as Merzbow is known in these parts. The Swiss duo don't want to alienate, and never settle for an inhuman or repellent noise on this LP. The craft, the manual labour, the home-madeness of it all is always detectable and ever-present.

You'll hear the same deeply layered 3-D effect as they achieve on the record they made with Otomo, *Bits and Bobs*. Far from an empty, formless grind-o-groans, this is a structured panoply of slices of chocolate devil's food cake sound-events, all set in motion simultaneously like a pack of running hares going over the hill. A richness of creative racket. And it performs miracles of restorative balm for the weary, run-down executive worker; this music massages all the pleasurable pressure-points on the body, feeds you, washes you, clothes you and puts you to bed, there to gently stroke your genitals to orgasm. How many records can offer all that?

Andy Guhl and Norbert Möslang are unique and important experimenters, and are renowned in their Swiss homeland as

inventors of the purple bubble-gum machine. Bubble-gum filled with tiny insects. And grandfather clocks, pendulums as grey as Father Time's beard, swinging next to soap-on-a-rope. Your eggs are done. Take another slippery step upon the rubber matting.

ED PINSENT

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Voice Crack are interviewed this issue.

Chikmountain

Porn On The Cob

USA TACHIST
RECORDS TR-001 CD
(2000)

What the fuck? Suggesting loose comparisons with Butthole Surfers' *Locust Abortion Technician* and Ground Zero *Null & Void* (and I do mean *loose* comparisons) this is rock music from the 'avant garde/white noise' end of the spectrum, with guitars,

drums and feedback, sometimes a few drones. Throughout there's also an uninspired, (perhaps deliberately) random use of found sound - anything from porno moans and grunts to radio ghosts, all very...well, y'know. Heard it before, heard it done better (Ground Zero, for example).

However, there IS still something of interest here, a distinctly human aspect to the proceedings that involves the listener and encourages you to proceed further. They play with conviction and true verve that suggests that they actually care about what they're doing, however intentionally 'fucked up' some of the end results may be. The same cannot be said for many of their contemporaries who seem to trade on the Naked Emperor theory that none dare call it shit lest someone think it's 'important'. Don't want to be left out in the critical wasteland, best get behind the next brainless bandwagon that rolls along.

Chikmountain are not shit. They play from the heart. With more practice, more control and perhaps a wider range of influences they may yet come to yield more tantalising fruit. For now, file under 'Interesting' and add a point for a great title.

RIK RAWLING 11/05/2001

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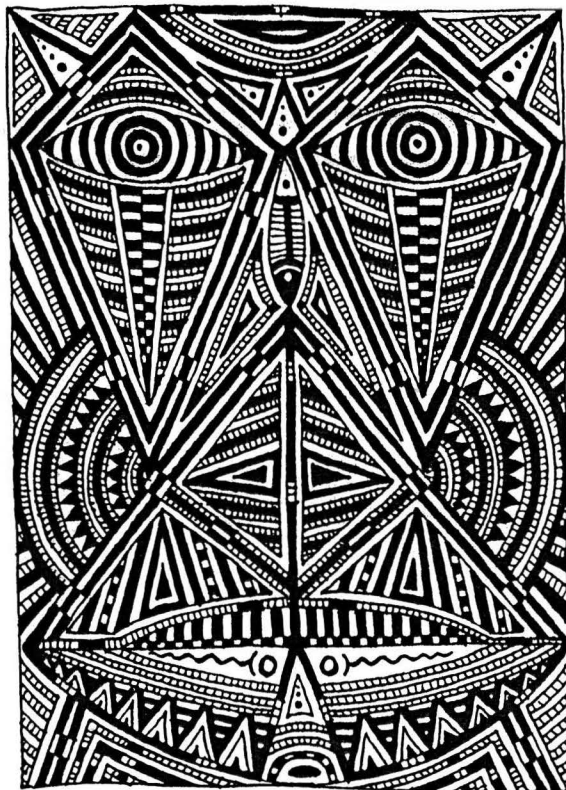
Merzbow

Live at Radio 100

THE NETHERLANDS E.R.S. CD002 CD
(2000)

Another festival of freakery from the 'Nabob of Noise', this particular release offers us the full Merzbow band experience, a rare enough thing in itself. Masami Akita was joined for a live set in Amsterdam by Reiko on the Theremin and Bara on voice and turntables, and a guest Dutch guy on more turntables. Although replete with the usual power electronics and damaged synth noise, this one is mostly composed of vinyl and turntabling antics. With uncanny timing and great humour to boot, Merzbow still manages to extract oodles of mirth and merriment from this most done-to-death of activities, and chisel new engravings of interest into the ears of an over-sophisticated audience jaded by the extreme turntabling of Otomo and Christian Marclay, and vinyl-vitiators of their ilk. So, when faced with the usual mixture of easy-listening records, Louis Armstrong records, techno records, hard-core guitar band records and 'Good Vibrations' played at half-speed, expect anything but the expected. These fragments are but relay-stations to orient the mind of the listener, who's shunted around the aural landscape like a passenger on a high-speed train.

And since the only buffers to slow you up are some 45 minutes away, best sit back with that sulphuric acid cocktail and enjoy the view from your smoked-glass window before it shatters from side to side. This is probably little more than a 'throwaway' performance by Merzbow's high standards, but when that man is ON then nobody can touch him. I





mean literally, because he's surrounded by a force-field of electrical energy that shocks intruders to death. This CD boasts typical Merzbow dynamics; the familiar metal grinding chug-a-chug of Masami as he abuses a metal misshape, set against the icy-cold wailing of Reiko's theremin, for example. Far from sitting back and letting the machinery do all their work, this power trio are playing *together* all the time, whatever their chosen weapon of sonic doom. Arrives shipped in a crush-proof (ha!) cardboard box of shiny ivory, with embossed lettering and blue printing. 300 copies only available for sale.

ED PINSENT

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**Zbigniew Karkowski /
Kasper T Toeplitz**
Le Depeupleur
GERMANY CROSS FADE
ENTERTAINMENT PP008 CD (2000)

I don't suppose Karkowski and Toeplitz had set out to create a movie soundtrack but if we suppose they had, *Le Depeupleur* would be the soundtrack and the film might be something like this:

An entirely silent (no dialogue, just music) feature on the history of terraforming Mars, starting with the time when probes landed on the surface and began drilling into the core of the planet, placing metal slag and other Earth junk into the spaces to alter the planet's gravity and increase its magnetic

fields. Over time, generations of humans arrive to direct ever more sophisticated terraforming technologies and methods while at the same time, these humans insert various technologies (hard and soft) into their own bodies to adapt to the changing living conditions; the technologies also incorporate more organic and especially human aspects (which may include flesh and body fluids). After the fine-tuning and the constant evolution (though it can never be said when the process actually finishes), a world develops that's not quite Mars and not quite Earth either; we recognise the humans and yet we don't recognise them; we can describe and even operate the technologies but there's a soul within that only the terraforming / terraformed humans know and which is far beyond our perceptions. We look into the eyes of these humans and wonder: do they plan to come to Earth and terraform us and our environments in their own image?

I wasn't thinking of having a cast or a plot or even some kind of linear-based narrative that would sit easily with Hollywood or even the arthouse / university circuit. (And I haven't read the Samuel Beckett play *The Lost Ones* which I think is about an escape attempt. Though it may be coincidental that the CD and the play happen to share the same title.) Nevertheless, we have a fictitious 'film' whose narrative is Karkowski and Toeplitz's *Le Depeupleur* and that's enough for me. Yes, I'm eager to see the film if someone would care to make it; I've heard the narrative many times already.

JENNIFER HOR

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Various Artists
Search and Destroy
GERMANY CROSS FADE
ENTERTAINMENT PP007 CD (2000)

Once in a while there comes along a CD with a very appropriate title like *Search and Destroy*. As in search and destroy all tedious and unoriginal industrial/techno bands like the lot featured here (Cassandra Datakill, Nitro, Pure, Somatic Responses) that wallow in techno-violence, cyberporn, post-industrial fascism and biomechanoid fusion fantasies amid tinny pseudo-factory beats, radio voice samples and out-of-control drum machines as though Front Line Assembly, Nine Inch Nails, Sheep on Drugs and their kind hadn't already ploughed such territory. (There's even a track that copycats Sheep on Drugs.) For my money, Shinya Tsukamoto's movie *Tetsuo: The Iron Man* had the last word on this topic way back in 1989, plus the soundtrack was much better.

And like the fellow on the front and inside covers of this release, you'd be puking lime-green icy popsicles if you had to listen to any more of this tired guff. Next CD, please!

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Hilmar Örn Hilmarsson introduction

Hilmar is known to most listeners I suppose through his brief association with Genesis P. Orridge - he appeared on the 1984 *Live In Reykjavik* Psychic TV record which Gen made on his trip there - and with his great friend David Tibet. They made *Crowleymass*, a disco tribute to Aleister Crowley, and attracted many a would-be occultist to their doors, only to turn them away again. Hilmar isn't averse to study of those areas, but takes it less seriously than Tibet. The *Island* LP credited to Current 93 and HOH was released in 1991 I think, with guests Rose McDowall et al. Reckoned to be a good one, but haven't heard it, nor the Crowley record. My entry point was an odd release in the Touch catalogue called *Children Of Nature* - a fine piece of modern classical music, I assumed, extremely poignant without ever being sentimental or mawkish. In fact, it's the soundtrack music for an Icelandic film. It came out on Touch thanks to Andrew MacKenzie, the Hafner Trio guy, who still had connections with Touch at that time and was living in Reykjavik. He engineered that recording and assisted in its release.

Hilmar has made a career composing soundtracks for Icelandic and Danish cinema, with several titles to his credit. He's worked several times with his good friend Fridrik Thor Fridriksson, Iceland's most prominent director - on *White Whales* (1987), *Children Of Nature* (1991), *Cold Fever* (1994) and *Angels of the Universe* (2000). The Danish movies *Bye Bye Blue Bird* (Katrín Ottarsdóttir), *Honour Of The House* (Guðny Halldórsdóttir) were also scored by Hilmar. With his soundtrack for Fridriksson's *Angels of the Universe* (see opposite for review) the music of Hilmar might be poised to reach a larger audience - partly because Sigur Rós are involved, and everyone's currently going bonkers about their anthemic rock stylings, but also because the film is getting an international release outside of its home country. Hilmar is an extremely down-to-earth, charming and modest man, reluctant to bask in reflected glory. I visited Reykjavik with two friends over Easter. We were struck by how taciturn the Icelandic temperament is, nobody wastes words. The landlord of our guesthouse in particular was a man who saw no point in continuing a conversation once the essentials had been stated: 'Your key is in your room!' The North Atlantic climate has also contributed, according to Hilmar. 'I think the landscape has probably shaped the national character quite a lot. It's a very humbling experience, to have all types of weather thrown at you every day.'



This interview took place upstairs at one of the many excellent coffee-houses in the capital. Hilmar graciously bought me a fine Cafetière filled with a delicious black brew, which sustained me after a cold and wet morning spent looking for whales in the North Atlantic. (EP)

Hilmar Örn Hilmarsson and Sigur

Rós

Englar alheimsins [Angels of the Universe] ICELAND KRÚNK CDKRÚ001 (2001)

Almost a split LP, this leads off with Hilmar's icily poignant string ensemble compositions, and closes with Sigur Rós playing their solemn brand of guitar-organ-drum and voice music. The album moves from soft and manageable tones, to loud volume and extremes of emotion, reaching an almost unbearable pitch; if this is the trajectory of the soundtrack, then the film must be emotionally wrought to an equally high degree. This may sound depressing, but isn't; this music arouses tremendous compassion and empathy - for a person and situation I'm not even clear about as yet. It is sad, but ennobling; it passes on a sense of the very human dilemma, a dilemma which might face all of us. This is far from the sort of relentless, nerve-shredding insistence on loneliness, bleak despair, and annihilation that Keiji Haino has been known to confront us with; Hilmar's approach is gentler, almost opaque.

Hilmarsson's compositions state and restate a simple theme, and gradually suggest the onset of the lead character's madness as the tracks darken in pitch. Foreign elements are introduced and mixed in: static noise, drumbeats, a mismatched 'dark techno' episode. If we compare this work to any Hollywood soundtrack past or present, for example the 'classic' use of the Theremin to suggest a psychologically wayward mind in *Spellbound*, then *Englar* wins out because it is so completely fresh. In fact, discussing 'musical clichés' isn't even an option when faced with this sort of emotional honesty in soundtrack work. It is ultimately a very moving tribute to a friend, without ever once sounding self-congratulatory or saccharine.

The gradual build-up to all-out insanity paves the way for the anthemic rock hymns of Sigur Rós - it's the first thing I've heard from these much-touted young hopefuls of Reykjavik, and it's superb music. They're liked a souped-up millennial version of something in the Genesis-Floyd-Yes school, and deliver more on the promises made by *Godspeed You Black Emperor!* (a band whose appeal has yet to become apparent to these ears). Their use of drums and voice in particular suggest matters both ancient and huge (like the Icelandic landscape), and betokens a respect for something bigger than themselves. They have a humility you won't find in any average UK or American guitar band.

With liner notes mostly in Icelandic, I'm stuck to offer you more, but there are quotes here from Macbeth, Francis Bacon and even Hildegard of Bingen. Hildegard is the mystical 11th century German abbess, visionary, musician and poet whose works were brought to popular attention by Christopher Page. She's been unfortunately appropriated by new age types recently, despite previous and more informed recognition from David Tibet. These quotes place the music and the film within the context of Macbeth's themes of utter futility (life's but a walking shadow) and the explorations of the darker side of the human psyche as limned unflinchingly by Bacon, Britain's finest painter ever. But the Hildegard quote, an appeal to the angels who guard the souls of people, adds the dimension of divine redemption to the equation. There is hope. This record is a project to redeem the value of the life of the poor doomed protagonist, a life to which *Angels of the Universe* is a monument.

ED PINSENT

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A Tragic Beauty

Hilmar Örn Hilmarsson

+++++ Interview in Reykjavik 16 April 2001 +++++

EP Could you tell me a bit more about this new soundtrack, first of all.

HOH *Angels of the Universe*. It was written for this film by Fridrik Thor Fridriksson, who is Iceland's most prominent film director and an old friend of mine. And the script is also written by an old friend of mine, an uncle of mine, and it was the story of his real-life brother - who was obviously also an uncle of mine. And it's basically the story of someone who becomes mad, progressively madder as things go on. And in a way, I think it's a very personal project for most of the people involved, because it's taking a story from all those years ago, and seeing this come about to this person. It's a tombstone and an act of appeasement, really. The whole thing. Because, on a personal note, I thought...OK, I was reading books by R D Laing and David Cooper, and books about psychiatry and anti-psychiatry. So I never really took his illness seriously, when he was really ill. So in a way it was a nice thing to do, for me to come back to the story and in a way go through this whole thing, just face the facts involved, and also the beauty and the genius involved as well.

EP It's a very sympathetic film?

HOH Mm, yes. It's also - it doesn't offer any [solution] ... it's not a saccharine world of madness that you get in American films. It's pretty dreadful, in that sense! Yes, a bit difficult to watch. When the film got nominated as Iceland's choice for the Oscar nominations, I think nobody thought it would get far, because in America...a film where nearly everyone in the movie kills themselves! One suicide is bad enough I think. Two is a bit messy, and three is probably an impossible thing to swallow. But it's real life for those people, and for them it was the solution. It's probably a very dark and gloomy film in some sense, but also there's beauty in it, a tragic beauty.

EP Is it ultimately uplifting?

HOH I think so, because of the Icelandic way of dealing with these things, which goes back to the old AEdic sayings. 'A man lives forever if he's left behind a reputation'. And somebody writes him a tombstone. Most of the runic monuments in Scandinavia are there to keep the name alive, the memory alive. In that sense, the traditional sense, we've somehow given this friend of ours eternal life, or at least a shot at it. So that's the uplifting thing about the whole thing!

EP Are you pleased with the way the film turned out? Do you think it's a sympathetic portrayal of your friend?

HOH I think it's absolutely amazing, yes. I think all of us were scared to death of this project, because it's based on a really successful book¹, and also it's pretty worrying when [you think] how much realism you're bringing to it. I mean, do you want the main actor² to look like the person who he's portraying? Do you want to put things in a certain period or time, put a time frame around the action? Or do you just make the film story unique, which it was? The director decided in the end that in a way, it's timeless. Some of it might have happened in the late 1960s, some of it in the mid 1990s. Ultimately it's not a realistic film. We enter the madness of the main character. Through the music, we hear what he is becoming like.

¹ By Einar Mar Guðmundsson, who also wrote the screenplay.

² Ingvar E. Sigurðsson plays the protagonist Paul.

EP So through the film you're seeing the world as he's seeing it? That must have taken some considerable courage, on your part, to do this.

HOH The main point is I care about the subject so much. I was afraid of setting myself an impossible task to begin with. Everything worked out. I think that all of us who worked on the project just suddenly got this feeling, and mid-way through it we thought 'this is going to turn out all right'. In doing it, there are just so many pitfalls you prepare for yourself in setting it up. It's almost impossible, the things you want to accomplish. For some strange reason, we managed to...

EP Were you involved from the very start?

HOH Yes, it was a group of friends. Some of these projects have been brewing for about ten or fifteen years. This is something we've been talking about from way back. I've followed it through all the script stages.

EP And Sigur Rós are also on the soundtrack?

HOH Yes. I think it's absolutely perfect. I think they are one of the best things that's happened in music in the last decade or so. They're absolutely fantastic. We're basically on the same wavelength. Their contribution to the film is absolutely essential.

EP You've done quite a lot of soundtracks. Do you have to have a measure of personal investment for every film that you work on?

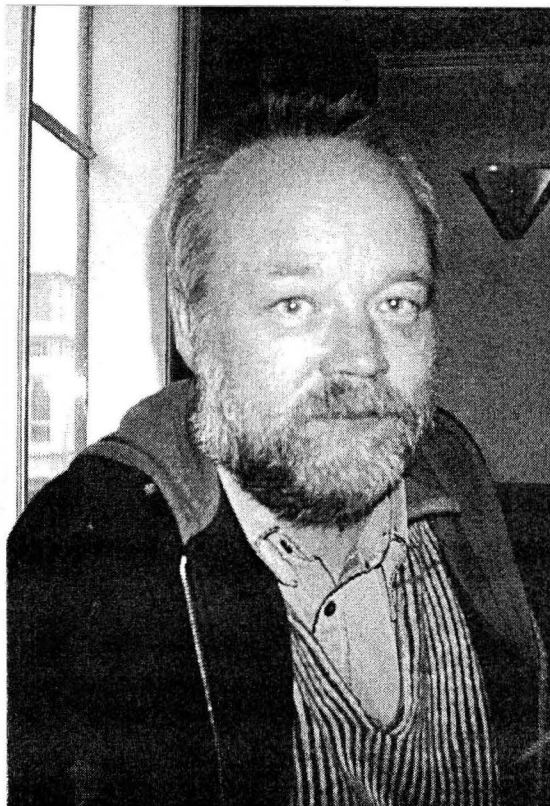
HOH Yes, I've been lucky actually. I've been able to choose my own projects. I feel I have to be involved on a personal level. I turn down the things that don't interest me. If I think the story is interesting, and the director is passionate, then I'll do it. I mean, that's a privilege really.

EP Is this how you make a living, through film scores?

HOH Yeah, mostly.

EP What about the Children of Nature film, did that also have a personal interest?

HOH Oh yes. That's the first film I scored entirely myself. It was also a break-out film for everybody involved. It was the first Icelandic film that got an Oscar nomination, and went on to win many prizes



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all over the world. In the way it just put a lot of people on the map. So for us, it's a before and after thing. You can say 'this is before *Children of Nature*, and this is after.'

EP What is the story about?

HOH It's basically a geriatric road-movie! Two people who run away from an old people's home, to go back to where they lived in their youth. It's a journey towards death. Everybody who heard about or read about the idea thought it was absolute crap. But it's a wonderful film. Again, the whole point of the film is dying - it's all about coming to terms with dying. In the film there are a number of funerals. Death plays a vital part. It was rather nice that Disney wanted to get the American rights for the film, and do it in America with an American cast, and they wanted Jason Robards to play the main character, and Jessica Tandy to play the woman. But of course, they wanted to change the ending! The characters die in the end, and [to change that] would make the film totally ridiculous, because it's all about that.

EP So, the rights were refused, I hope.

HOH Yes, we refused them.

EP Your soundtrack is a very beautiful record, and it stands up by itself. When I first heard it I assumed you were a modern composer, and this was a new work. It evokes tremendous compassion, real feeling...

HOH I was working with two of Iceland's major character actors, absolutely wonderful people, I mean they played their hearts out in this film. It would have been stupid, I would have to be totally devoid of talent, if some of that hadn't rubbed off [on the music]. I think we knew when we were doing it, this was going to be some sort of landmark. It was just one of those things where everything comes together.

EP How did its release through Mike Harding come about?

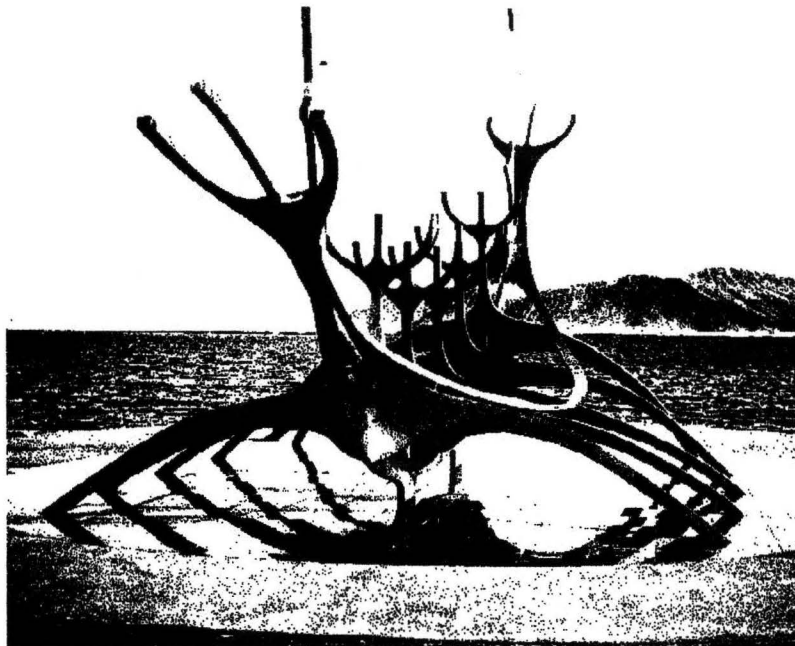
HOH Well, it was in a pretty roundabout way. A lot of people were really interested in putting out the *Children of Nature* soundtrack. At one stage, even Virgin in America were considering it. Somehow that didn't feel right, because it was really a special thing for me, and I really just wanted it to be a special project, as the whole thing had been. And then Andrew McKenzie, who had been putting things out through Touch, showed me some Touch releases, and I thought it was wonderful stuff. So after lying around for two or three years, it came out soon after the film was released. Touch show respect to the material they're putting out. It's nice.

EP I get the impression you're quite knowledgeable about the history of Iceland, and its mythology.

HOH No, I don't think I am. It's an Icelandic thing. Most of us are obsessed with history. It's something that matters a lot to us, the old sagas and the Aëddic poems, and the mythology. It's what makes us what we are. Also because we have such a sad and dire [history]. The Middle Ages in Iceland were a terrible period. After we lost our independence, and came under the Norwegian king; Icelandic people ended up under the Danish crown. This ended up being a really horrible story...Iceland was being rented out to small counts, who taxed it to death. A rather sad story of oppression. The only way we could hang on to our pride was to re-tell all these ancient stories about glory and our wonderful and colourful past. We had no buildings, only these terribly damp turf-houses. All our monuments were stories, really. So in that sense we're pretty unique. Iceland's main export about the year 1000 was poets and storytellers. Pretty ironic that the Norwegians had to import poets from Iceland. All of this is based on this old story-telling tradition, and it matters very much to us.

EP I mention it, because tradition doesn't seem to matter much to English people. In England we lack a sense of our own history. We have a very important history of folk music, for example, which is terribly neglected.

HOH Yeh, but still you're pretty lucky I think. I lived in Denmark five years, and they have no sense of history at all! For most Danish people, history seems to start yesterday! In England at least, they make it a point to teach history and there are wonderful things being done, in England, over the last century and a half in collecting old fairy tales, folk songs. I've just been reading this book by John Purser about Scottish folk music. He did these wonderful radio programmes from BBC Radio Scotland on



Scottish folk music. I think that's really important and fantastic.

EP That's true, and there was Peter Kennedy who made a lot of folk recordings for BBC radio...

HOH So I think there some interesting things being done. I think also you had all these people, like The Incredible String Band, who in a way - they may have been some way out on the fringes, but still somehow made people aware of the old traditions. You remember Traffic's

'John Barleycorn' - a very popular song. So I think there's always been these little references to the folk music tradition.

EP We were outside this church yesterday, on the Golden Circle...they'd put up these two stones, apparently symbolising the conflict between Christianity and paganism in Iceland. Does Iceland have such a history?

HOH Iceland was a pagan state for 100 years. All the laws were pagan. Iceland's conversion to Christianity was more an act of diplomacy than fervence for religious ideas. We found out that we were unable to trade with Britain unless we at least pretended to be Christian. Because they refused to trade with pagans! Large parts of Europe were becoming Christian as well. It was an act of good business relations, business interests. So when Iceland became nominally Christian in the year 1000, locals still used to practice the old religion, they just did it out of sight, so it was a nice solution. We've never had religious morals banged into our heads. When we look at Iceland's religious practices and inclinations, they are more pagan than Christian. This big exhibition that was planned for last year was going to be a celebration of 1000 years of Christianity in Iceland. It just fell apart at the seams and nobody turned up! They expected at least 70,000 people to show up at this celebration, and about 12,000 did, and most of them were performing. Or were the parents of the performers! It was a nice fiasco. Certainly put the poor Church in its place.

EP Do you do anything else with your music, besides film composition?

HOH Yeh, me and Sigur Rós, we're planning...well, pagan is probably not the word for it, but one of the Aëddic poems that was thrown out of the corpus of Aëddic poems in around 1864. It's a really nice poem called *Raven's Magic*. It's a very millennial poem about the end of the world. The Reykjavik Festival of the Arts has commissioned a piece based on that, for next year, which I'll be writing along with Sigur Rós, and we'll be performing it with a big orchestra and a choir. So that's a long-term thing.

EP Is this a project you particularly relish?

HOH Absolutely! I've been delving into something that was a mixture of poetry recital and strange sing-song chanting. I'm doing a project based around this magical poem from the 17th century, which is to

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be released along with a book on Icelandic magical practices. I've been going through all the material and working on it for the last few months.

EP Very intriguing. What characterises Icelandic magic?

HOH A lot of the old pagan practices carried on the magical tradition. Also it was pretty amazing that... Iceland was really shut off from European culture, you can see that Icelanders were pretty much with-it when it came to magical practices in the Middle Ages. They were reading the same books by Albertus Magnus and Cornelius Agrippa, and all this was known by the authorities. These books were read by the clergy in Iceland, a nice little underground clique of people who just studied these things. At the same time, some of the older magical things were practised, by farmers, up until the last century.

EP Have you heard the music of Florian Fricke, Popol Vuh? There's a slight similarity to your music...not just in the surface, the sound, you both use choirs, but there seems to be a strong sense of ritual to his music. Is that something you'd identify with?

HOH Yes, I know Popol Vuh. I think once you tune in to the ritualistic aspect of music, you're bound to come up with some similarities, but also for me the ritual is, ironically enough, within the Christian ritual. A lot of my religious sentiments automatically have a Bach flavouring to them. Transcendentalism is nowhere more clearly portrayed than in Bach's work. So that also becomes a reference. It comes in a mish-mash of ideas. You can't really discard church music.

EP I believe you met up with Genesis P Orridge in the 1980s. Psychic TV is not music that I know much about, to be brutally honest. I've read about his work.

HOH Well, I think Genesis was always more about the ideas than the music. He left the music to other people, myself amongst them - very briefly. It was a learning experience. For all his sins, Gen is a great catalyst - he brings together interesting people, and I met some people, people I'm still working with today. I became pretty disillusioned with the whole Psychic TV thing, to be honest. The joke became on everybody involved, it backfired. I'm glad I went through it, in the sense it gave me access to studio equipment which had never happened. Things I had only dreamed about before. For me personally, it was not a very satisfying experience.

EP What instrument were you playing at that time?

HOH Keyboards and percussion, mostly. Whatever that was needed.

EP Did you make any solo records at that time?

HOH No, but I recorded quite a few things, which were then rehashed and put to other uses. At the end of that period I started doing things with David Tibet. He's one of my dearest friends. We have a similar sense of humour. I look on David as being one of the greatest English poets - of this, or any century. Really, I think he's a tremendous writer and that makes his music also extremely interesting, because he's got a strange way of looking at the world.

EP Do you share any of his esoteric interests?

HOH Yes, but I think he's much more of a researcher than I am. For him, it's a situation of life and death. I'm much more relaxed! I like the whole lunacy aspect. I think bogus religious leaders are extremely interesting and funny. I just like the funny aspects of it all. I think David's much more sincere and honest about it than I am.

EP What else have you done with Andrew MacKenzie? He was in the Hafler Trio, wasn't he?

HOH Oh yes. He lived in Iceland for a period of time, so we did quite a few things together, but probably a bit less than he wanted. I'm a very lazy person. He's much more active than I am. I like to lie around and sit in my sofa. He would try and drum up interest in something...I'd rather find an old book to read.

EP What is your working method, for making music?

HOH It's a question of making space for ideas to come down, and just take shape. A strange process, because I do a lot of work in preparation and then I discard about ninety percent of it. But there is always something that remains. When it happens, it happens pretty quickly. I have a tendency to do a bit too much, before I narrow things down. I love that William Blake adage, you have to know what is too much before you know what is enough. 'Less is more' has never appealed to me. Except afterwards. I do too much, and then I strip it down.

EP Are you classically trained?

HOH I studied the violin and the piano when I was younger, but ironically enough my great love was playing jazz. Playing in jazz clubs, that's how I got started. Then I got interested in electronics. So it's a strange way of moving around. I knew I would never be a good classical performer. Even performing classical pieces seemed a bit pointless to me. It was always the idea I would compose music, but given my background, my family background, it was seen as something I could do after I had been rehearsing ten hours a day, and become a great performer, then maybe I could move onto the next step. I wanted to discard all that, and throw myself into composing. I think I came in through the back door.

EP Do you like jazz? Do you like American free jazz music, for example?

HOH I have to say I became disillusioned with it in the end, maybe because of the small jazz scene in Iceland. It was more geared towards Be-Bop, which I detest and I just can't take it. Icelandic jazz became extremely snobbish during the period I came up. Like with a lot modern classical music, free jazz just went up an alley and never came back. It's probably stuck there up against the wall now! I think free jazz must have a new name by now! Never cared enough to find out. I like Miles Davis. Bitches Brew is always a thing to come back to.

EP So what else is going on musically in Iceland?

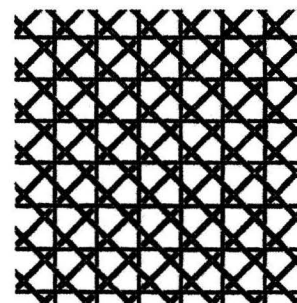
HOH A tremendous amount of things are going on here. Iceland has a strange national culture. You find one of each [musical genre] here...you look for an interesting death metal band, there's bound to be one here in Iceland! You want to find some really interesting electronic avant-garde composer, there's bound to be one as well. There's also a lot of collaboration in all the different areas of music, which I think is interesting. A nice little scene. The good thing with music in Iceland, is people help each other out a lot. You have this cross-fertilisation, both creatively and the exchange of ideas, but also people are lending their equipment to other people, getting together and doing stuff, which somehow always takes stuff one step further.

EP Is there an audience for all this new music?

HOH Yes, strangely enough there is. There are always some of these happy surprises. With Sigur Rós, the first album sells 600 copies. Then the second album comes out and it's sold over 12,000 copies so far, and it's still selling. It's a pleasant surprise.

EP The Kitchen Motors thing sounds like an interesting little collective scene...

HOH There are people putting time into setting up events, work which on the surface seems to be unconnected and not serving any special direction, but when you look back at it there's always some sort of method in the madness. It's always leading somewhere, and I think it's fantastic.



Some other HOH appearances, besides those noted above:

With Current 93, HOH appears on *Menstrual Night*, *Swastikas for Noddy* and an oddity called *Harry Oldfield's Crystal*

With The Hafler Trio: *H3OH*

With Psychic TV (Alex Fergusson, John Gosling, Grey Wolf, Priestess, Lores, H, Godchrist et al): *Those Who Do Not*, GRAMM RECORDS GRAMM 23 double LP (1984). Partially issued as *Live In Reykjavik* as part of the Live 23 series.

Invocation is a compilation on Six Degrees Records; Hilmar has one track, 'Ars Moriendi'.

People Like Us

A Fistful of Knuckles

USA CACIOVALLO CAD 10 CD (2000)

From the second you hear the opening cuts, there's that enjoyable thrill of accidentally tuning in to some demented radio station, where everything is going wrong. Everything hops about in the same restless method as commercial radio – bombarding the listener with information – except that PLU, through fast-moving scrambling edits, continues to disrupt common sense and (although her work might resemble commercial radio superficially) refuses to communicate according to the same rigid conventions that DJs, programmers, and anyone in the mainstream media business, are forced to observe. The listener almost does a double-take; although admittedly that feeling doesn't last for long once you catch on to the little games she's playing.

Of course PLU, aka Vicki Bennett, lets you in on the game immediately. There's a spoof 'Cowboy' theme to this release. Musically, half of the sampled and cut-up tracks she uses are kitsch Cowboy songs, harmonica tunes, acoustic guitars strumming by the campfire; and numerous dialogue samples from Cowboy TV shows or movies. As usual, the trick is to subvert the clichés and banality of the sources.

She does this by putting mild obscenities in the mouths of squinky-clean easy listening singing groups; by reassembling fragments of dumb tunes into even dumber tunes; and by layering and juxtaposing all her pre-selected incongruous elements into clashing arrangements. The brain will implode trying to sort out the mass of conflicting messages in this sound-collage.

For sleeve art, PLU uses that faux-rustic 'wooden logs' font deployed on a million caravan campsites across the world. On the front cover there's a sinister row of clean-cut young lads in uniforms, singing around a campfire with phoney, painted-in flames. Inside, there's a diorama of utterly contrived banality, plastic cowboy figures and cactuses in front of a ghastly Nancy-Kominski styled palette-knife landscape daub. Others have reacted rather sniffily to PLU lately, implying that her targets are easy ones and that, politically, she's a lightweight. But I think it takes a special talent to make serious art out of what is clearly a love-hate relationship with these cringe-inducing sources. She has made much of sending up the inexhaustible inanities of traditional British bad taste; true, she's gone for an American theme this time, but it's more to do with the way American culture is perceived and refracted through the stodgy UK mentality. And there are several essays already written on *that* theme...

PLU sends up the homespun homilies of the Cowboy, scrambling a fireside soliloquy of stupefying crassness into something that resembles an existentialist meditation on the futility of life. 'What are you doing out here if this road doesn't go anywhere?' In doing this, PLU might be connecting to the 'Cowboy Philosopher' idea which was used by the Situationists in Paris, a theme commented on in great detail by Greil Marcus in *Lipstick Traces*, his book on Punk, Dada and Situationism. The Situationists' brand of subversion included the 'detourné', where the word-balloons of extremely ordinary genre comic strips would

be blanked out and replaced with wildly inappropriate political slogans and lengthy discourses on philosophy. It's obvious that PLU is fully aware of all of this, and her own work makes much of doing a 'detourné' in sound.

For this release, PLU is joined by other notables in the field: Mr Rotorvator,

Wobbly, Chilli Chest, The Jet Black Hair People, Ricky Dagner, Pike Bishop, M C Schmerz, Gummy Gumbrell and Donny Lee. All credit due to these fellows for contributing to the general air of controlled hilarity.

ED PINSENT

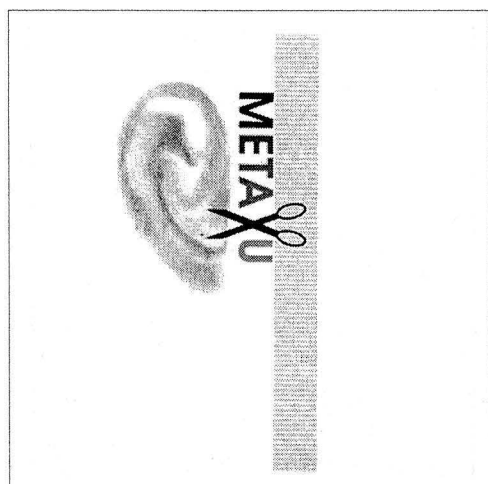
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My Jazzy Child Un Grand Coup de Lassitude

FRANCE PRICILIA RECORDS 015
CD (2001)

A splendid release from this young French turntablist / radio player, who has a number of Paris gigs under his belt, besides two releases on his own Evenement label. His name is misleading – this is nothing to do with 'jazzy'. He has a minimal charm, realizing effective results using very simple means, and is blessed with a strange, semi-surreal approach to sound-organisation which I'm persuaded you might enjoy. Seems that musically, he lives somewhere between 'electro ambient' and improvisation – an intriguing locale, which is probably one of those forgotten suburbs as featured in the movie *La Haine*. His first track is a slowed-down stuck record beat, competing against the birds singing audibly in the background, plus the sounds of urban traffic; it has a hypnotic quirkiness and works because it obliges us (in true Cagney fashion) to pay more attention to the background sounds we normally ignore, allowing them to become music. Beautiful music at that. 'C'est la bataille', pitches an army of clanking coffee-cups against a sea of heavy vinyl-surface crackling; the





oppositional narrative which unfolds would require a Svankmajer to do it justice. 'Triste d'être maybe' uses a skipping record turned into a loop, Philip Jeck style, to create a fractured Eno-like soundscape, not without a touch of nostalgia. 'Des Vacances Très Nouvelle Vague' uses a similar approach, sourcing classical music perhaps, and this cut remains stamped with a peculiarly French identity. Not just because of the French-speaking radio samples, or the nameless schoolchildren singing to a nameless piano. It might almost be a fragment of a soundtrack from a forgotten Jean Cocteau film; it has that between-the-wars innocence, and that same lyricism. This could be the most affecting track here, but the final cut 'Un Apprentissage Très Positif' is the most ambitious. Eighteen and one-half minutes depicting a bewildering day at the pension. It starts out with the wireless crackling while the furniture movers are in, causing havoc with the chaise longue. Then the upstairs neighbour practices some light feedback work on his heavy metal guitar. They all shut up for a second or so when the concierge enters, breathing fire, but she is soon tied to a standard lamp and the party continues...get the picture? To find out the exciting ending, send away for this fine CD.

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Metaxu

Metaxu

GERMANY PLATE LUNCH PL16 CD (2000)

Metaxu are Maurizio Martusciello on sampler and electroacoustic objects, and Filippo Paolini on sampler, turntables and CDs. Their debut CD is an undistinguished addition to the sampling genre. Its eight untitled tracks are resolutely formulaic, with bursts of distortion and interference counterbalanced by high-pitched pulses and frequencies. These strategies are too irritating to be memorable, and yet when the soundfield activity turns towards the minimal, the results are no more engaging.

Sampled vocals, strings and flute drift in and out of the mix, failing to make much of an impression amid the barrage of processed

sounds. The album only really takes off with the last track, an energetic yet eerie slab of noise that has a sense of urgency sadly lacking elsewhere.

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Roger Doyle

Babel / KBBL

IRELAND SILVERDOOR SIDO 003-5 CD / SIDO 006-7 CD 5 x CD (2000)

A fairly freaking enormous endeavour from Dublin-born composer Roger Doyle, formerly known as Operating

Theatre and with a few releases which I think went through the United Dairies chain under that name. This is the first thing I've heard by him, a project he's had underway since 1990! It's an extremely complex attempt to recreate a vast imaginary site - each piece of music is intended as a discrete 'room or place within an enormous tower city'. And, fittingly for a Tower of Babel theme, Doyle has also developed an idea about language he's had since the early 1980s - a musical alphabet composed of short abstract samples, which are analogous to human speech. A common universal image in art, this - and not just the Tower of Babel, which has inspired many a painter to imagine an architectural rabbit-warren. There's the 18th century engraver Piranesi with his imaginary prison cells, and Mervyn Peake's *Gormenghast* trilogy, with its inexhaustible supply of impossible rooms, bounded within a fantastic castle estate. The movie *Blade Runner* is a more populist version (and one that inspired Doyle). The closest parallels however lie with the maestro Jorge Luis Borges, himself no stranger to the image of the maze, and a builder of infinite libraries.

Doyle's built a labyrinth worthy of Dedalus; his Chinese puzzle only starts to reveal itself, if at all, somewhere in the middle of the third disc 'Delusional Architecture'. Here, many of the themes of the first discs 'Temple Music' and 'Chambers and Spirit Levels' are restated, if not repeated outright. When we do hear repeats, quite often we're listening to the same piece of music (or dialogue) from another room, with the trick sounds of muffling providing this illusion. Doyle tries to create actual spaces, though aural reconstructions of the acoustics of rooms and chambers; and he builds dream spaces, working with free-flowing voices and instrumental performances to suggest interior dialogues of his minimal characters. There are fragments of narrative and drama here, hinted at through brief snippets of carefully-enunciated dialogue, and in the unholy song-speech stylings of Olwen Fouere.

Doyle's music is all-electronic, comprising very listenable keyboard and programming work; he even allows disco-style beats into the equation, and acoustic instruments

including the delightful Evan Parker-like saxophone of Jo O'Grady, and the 'distant piano' of Trevor Knight, which should come as a treat to all those haunted by Polanski's *Repulsion* movie. The surface is mostly electronic however, and Doyle's prize-winning electro-acoustic treatments never fail to create a powerfully compelling sense of surface and depth, always drawing the listener in towards an imaginary centre of gravity, and propelling the semi-narrative structure of the work at all times.

Generally the meaning of *Babel* remains delightfully obscure and oblique, right up until the final CDs where, it seems, Doyle repeats his ideas as farce. *KBBL (A Supplement to Babel)* depicts a DJ station where the host Big Bob Mubarek (played by Seattle DJ William Monigold) babbles on inanely, supremely oblivious to the apocalyptic scenarios playing outside. The building is hundreds of stories high, scraping the clouds; while outside bleak weather, traffic, and overpopulation are only a few manifestations of this Ballard-esque degeneration. Not exactly light irony, is it? These last CDs are something of a disappointment after the allusive qualities of the main work, but it might be the easiest way into this dauntingly large and challenging work. Starting at it head-on, some listeners might give up with the endless repetitions of those irritating temple bells. But the intention is, as with a large-scale skyscraper, to provide a multitude of entry points; so presumably the listener could start anywhere and enter this Tower at almost any level. Enjoy your stay.

ED PINSENT

www.cmc.ie

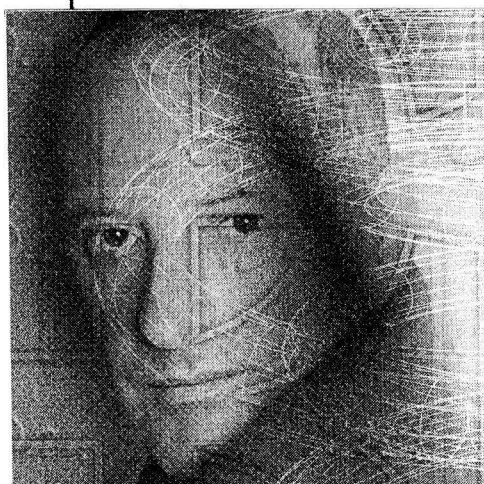
DDAA

Nouveaux Bouinages

Sonores (Dans La Periode)

FRANCE FRONT DE L'EST FDLCD01 CD (1992)

Complètement dingue! Quite an old one too - mysteriously arrived in the mail from France from the good people at Front De L'Est. It's a sprawling, drifting, sound-collage, a sack filled with sonic debris that is quite literally all over the place - no attempts at tunes, but lots of scraping noises, horns,



guitar freakouts and electronic wobbles, all hemmed in by an ever-shifting rhythm section. There's attempts at reggae, hip-hop, industrial beats, dance beats, bongo rhythms, all of which help to fence in the music, hold everything together. The collage grows increasingly absurd as it progresses - lots of voice samples, laughing, radio and TV commentary, and attempts at singing, along with all the other sounds - but it never grows so complex (or just plain silly) that it becomes unlistenable. If it was nothing but voice and beats, I'd be bored by now - I suppose it's the added semi-musical detritus that engages the interest? Whatever, this is a coherently nutso work. Deserves a better package than the photocopy wraparounds I currently have for it (it's very home-made).

All very bizarre, fun and bonkers, in a Holger Czukay sorta way. Real maximalism, allowing anything and everything to add to the universal mix of sound. I have no idea where this piece is going, who its creators were or what they intended, or what it all means. But in the right mood, I could listen to this kind of spastic nonsense for hours, believe me.

ED PINSENT

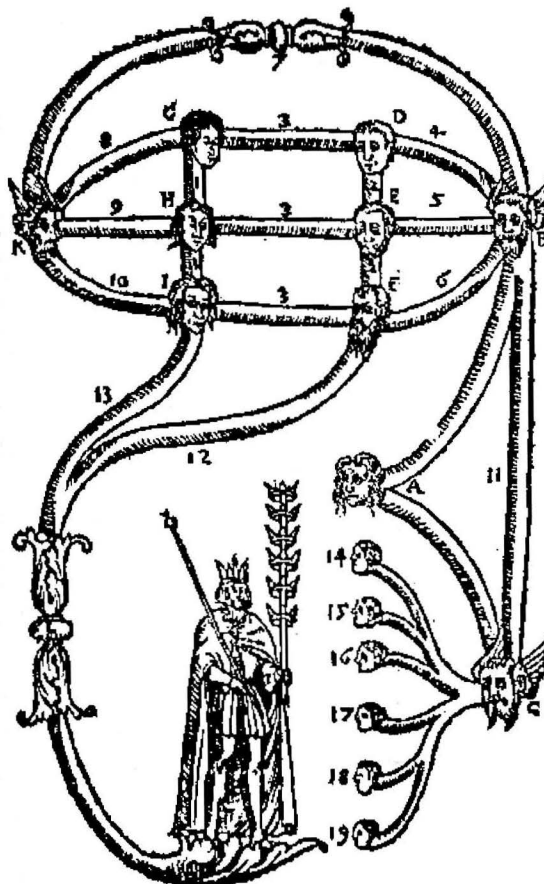
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frontdelest@wanadoo.fr

John Wall

Constructions V-VII
UNITED KINGDOM UTTERPSALM
CD5 CD (2001)

John Wall ups the ante on his own project once again. This new CD, intended as a sequel to *Constructions I-IV*, is even more abstracted, and composed of even smaller and more intense elements, than before. What's more, it's much shorter. *Constructions V-VII* lasts only 24 minutes, yet it's packed with compressed ideas and fully-realised sound worlds.

The latest Metamkine catalogue emphasises, quite rightly, Wall's place as a composer, or more precisely a re-composer who uses other records. His sources have now become all but unrecognisable and untraceable, rendered into micro-particles. This miniaturisation is most evident on the opening cut 'hylo', which comprises compacted micro-fragments of digital rattling and echoes (and might be sampled from Mego recordings; Pita and Fennesz are namechecked as sources). This is one of the smallest sound-worlds yet put onto record; it's like walking amongst atoms which appear to be as large as planets in orbit. It's a testament to his determination that Wall can reconstruct such disparate and imperceptible moments into a coherent musical statement. He's like a jeweller, working with a metal chain of the tiniest filigree.



'Stem' contains slightly more sonic variety, starting with a series of rattles and scrapes and breathy passages. It suggests infra-red photography showing physical displacements of air currents in streams. Then more ominous tones creep in, doors opening in the depths of Hell, an elevator ride through an abandoned high-tech skyscraper. 'Stem' finishes with a long refrigerator-hum drone made up of tones so thin and pure that not even the smallest pipes on a Cathedral organ could hope to reproduce them.

The opening crashing seconds of 'Luxi var' are an abrupt awakening after that soothing tone. This one incorporates live improvisation work into the hermetically-sealed mix. Ghosts of performers, their musical discourse rendered into a few distilled moments. It develops into a quieter interchange of breaths and harmonics (perhaps taken from Evan Parker's sax), and ends on a disquieting note after a dramatic turn.

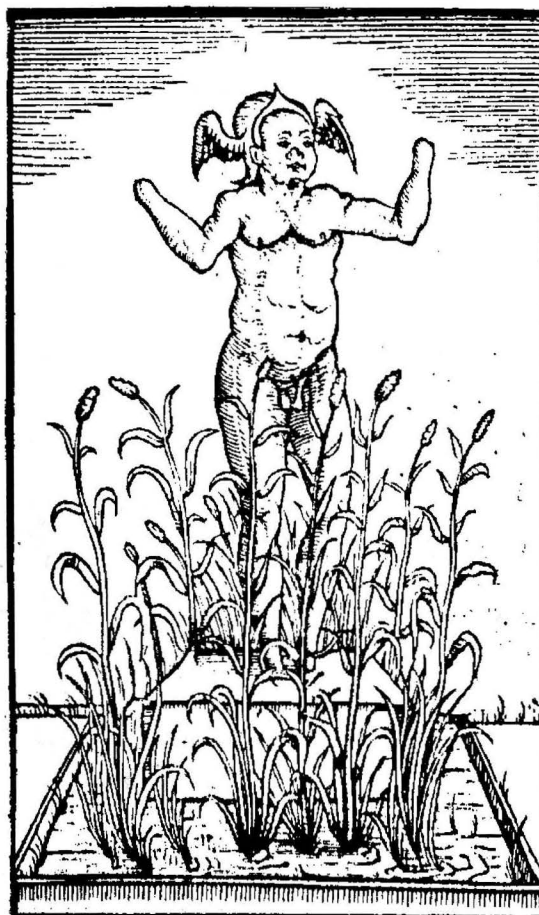
There seems to be a progressive attempt by Wall to further atomise and reduce the contributions of the source CDs which feed into his work. *Alterstill* - the first one I heard - is like a Tricky LP compared to this new one, which advertises its severity through the elegantly minimal typographic sleeve (designed by Wall and Clive Graham) with its title embossed in blind. Kaffe Matthews is currently bent on a similar course of action, weeding out the element of musical performance so that she ends up with nothing but live sound processing of the venue. Her work results in a sumptuous maximalist statement, in contrast to Wall's austerity. But this isn't to say he's engaged on some nihilistic agenda to eliminate music, or humanity, from his work. On the contrary, the less there appears to be to his works, the more he reveals about music and sound.

This CD is nothing whatever to do with 'clicks and cuts', current activities in sampling, or laptops; though he uses the computer and samples, John Wall is completely outside that culture of laziness and fashion, which results in an obscene excess of unwanted CDs from self-serving nobodies with barely a half-assed idea between them. Wall, by contrast, is a sharp, hard-working modernist composer whose work stimulates ideas, thoughts and action. He deserves your attention.

ED PINSENT

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Note: *Constructions I-IV* is the fourth solo record from JW, not the third as stated last issue.





1974

Photographs taken of the studio @ 1 Nineacres Drive Chelmsley Wood in 1974. Long ago I had a small studio - a Synthesi AKS and analogue tapes- this limited edition mini CD contains a found piece from '73 - some studio noises and what is the forerunner of the JLIAT drone works of the '80s and '90s

Distribution
Anomalous Records P.O. Box 22195, Seattle WA 98122-0195 USA



**A Sun Ra Bonanza
awaits you all my
sons!!**

★★★★★★

ARKESTRA Vinyl and CD
reissues scooped up into
the lobster claws of ED
PINSENT and released only
under duress

★★★★★★

IN THIS BATCH HERE'S a rough cross-section of the work and career of Sun Ra and incarnations of The Arkestra, strands which have been represented in vinyl artefacts crossing the record racks lately, even if some of the below have vanished in a twinkling. And in London at any rate there have been two live appearances by the Arkestra under the direction of Marshall Allen. Hard to credit, sometimes, that all of this great music could exist on the globe and stem largely from the juices

and drive of one gifted visionary and his brilliant team of adepts, acolytes and devotees. But perhaps the key here is empowerment, because Sun Ra clearly had a way to unleash untapped resources of energy. If you've worked as long as I have in an environment where the exact opposite is the case (and isn't the UK full of frustration, blocked energies, the dead hand of cynicism, and apathy?), then the idea of empowerment means a lot. Equally, it strains credibility that we've largely ignored a lot of this music for so long, but that's down to economics and logistics - poor distribution, low pressings, what have you. As more of this music becomes available, more people will get to hear it; it will change minds, affect patterns of thinking. It will have a benevolent effect on the quality of life. Even the laws of physics will need to be rewritten.

We could digress onto Sun Ra's obvious preoccupations with outer space, cosmic forces, space travel, distant planets...I wonder if some listeners see in all this a form of escapism, and that through the out-there music of Sun Ra we reach a fantasy world, untroubled by the perils and cares of real life. Maybe such listeners, if extant, use free music as a form of drug, a recreational drug that gives your mind a holiday. The reality is far more disturbing, and uncomfortable. Sun Ra was determined to face head-on the harsh realities of life: the inhumanities and cruelties of mankind, racism, wars, and the general ignorance and stupidity of people who refused to see what was under their very noses, even. Through the outer-space connection, it's possible he discovered a metaphor so multivalent that it could apply to just about everything he needed to say. Primarily, the race issue; through constantly stating that he was personally an 'alien' from Saturn, Sun Ra drove home the reality of the atrocious conditions suffered by Afro-Americans, under America's near-Apartheid regime in the 20th century. Through enigmatic riddles, strange plays on words, and wholly unscientific but extremely picturesque cosmic pronouncements, Sun Ra could build up a personal mythology and an idealistic political

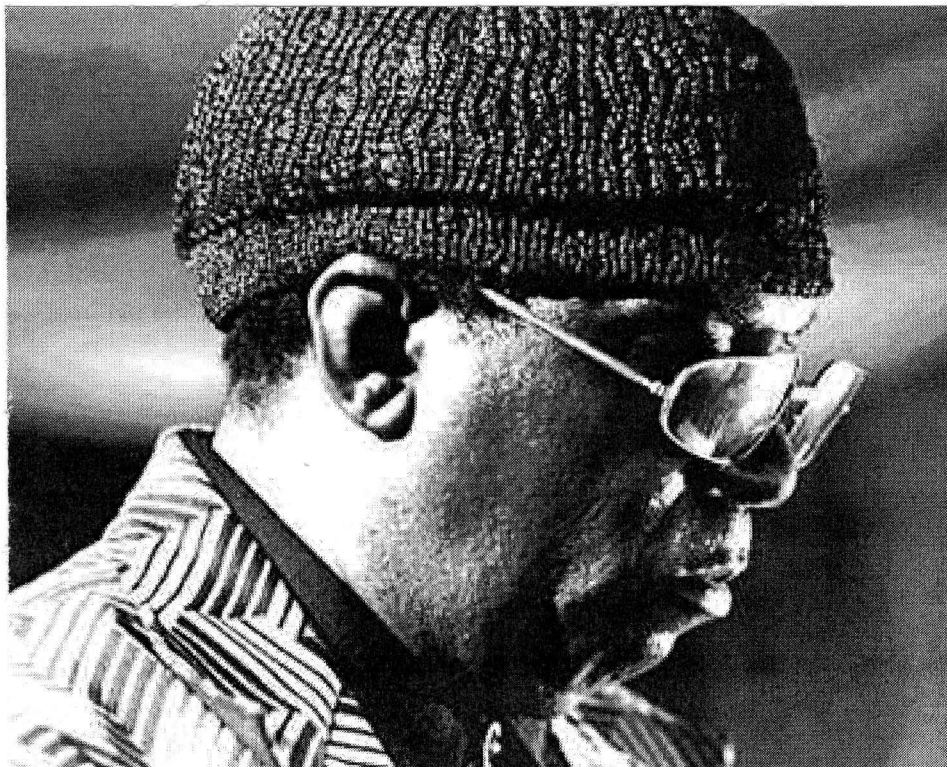
solution. By watching the skies, we might learn how to behave here on earth.

The exclusivity of the 'unofficial Sun Ra club' before this point in time has built up a whole new layer of archaeology, and a certain amount of bullshit, to cut through. All praise to any dedicated listener and collector who has managed to keep the flame alive during the dark years when Ra records weren't available as easily as they are now; but I have reservations about those who want to keep that flame to themselves, and not let others share its warmth. Their argument may have been: *this music is far too wonderful to share with ignorant people*. The music says the opposite: *it's far too wonderful NOT to share it with EVERYONE*.

SUN RA

THE NEWS FROM NEPTUNE

★★



Sun Ra and The Omniverse Jet Set Arkestra God's Private Eye: A Collection of Space Chants and rare Earth Tones USA HIS STORY 01 / 02 2 x CD (ND)

A must-have item to reference an important feature of an Arkestra concert experience, the so-called 'Cosmo Drama' sequence. Here be extended 'raps' and space chants of the man, the audience participation, the marches through the audience, the irresistible call to join in the dance. I am the Lord of the Dance, says he. In fact he claims to be the Lord of Saturn. These raps and chants are more like lectures set to music, set to a beat, free-association of ideas, challenging concepts set forth boldly and without reservation or qualification, and playful word-play mingled with curious eccentricity. Always expressed with a blinding, simple clarity. You can't claim not to understand. It's up to you if you choose not to listen.

The sound of these live shows is so welcoming, so warm. You know you're at home, in the right place, immediately. Compassion is here, friends who understand. An invitation to join the human race at last. But as soon as you get cosy, Ra is exhorting you to make a decision, make your stand, get involved, get into the game. When you hear this recording of the Arkestra marching into the audience, for example, chanting 'To Be Or Not To Be', I defy anyone not to feel roused into action. Slough off your skin of lethargy and you'll be marching 'shoulder to shoulder, man to man', proud of your humanity.

From 1980 live recordings in Detroit. A double CD set in a limited quantity, sadly. If you buy one, the proceeds go towards keeping the Marshall Allen Arkestra going. And that is not a bad thing to be doing. Again, the elite 'insider' view took a jaded withering glance at the Arkestra at the Jazz Café in London, and saw only a sad troupe of old men who refused to give up the ghost. Thank Ra that they haven't given up that ghost, that they continue to live and breathe the ideals and magic of his dream, trying their best to spread The Sound of Joy even though their leader lies dead. Doubtless, if you've been in the presence of Ra himself, such a night out can only be second-best. But that should not deny the real energies that are still pouring out of these guys, even to a certain extent in spite of themselves. The rituals of pointing to outer space, crying 'Somewhere There!' and singing 'Space Is The Place' is not just showbiz, but the fulfilment of a covenant.



Sun Ra and His Astro Intergalactic Infinity Arkestra

Discipline 27-11
'EL SATURN' 538 VINYL LP (ND)

'Have you heard the news from Neptune?' Part of the 'Discipline' Series from Secrets of the Sun, this is a 1972 studio LP recorded in Chicago (at the same session that produced the *Space is the Place* LP on Blue Thumb). The full Arkestra are here in many exciting combinations - including four conga players, and five members (including June Tyson) of the Space Ethnic Voices. Sun Ra began the Discipline series of compositions in 1971,



which Szwed describes as 'tightly conceived exercises using minimal material'. Members of the Arkestra would be given a horn line within a two or three note range, and required to play it without any deviation, because 'the slightest variation would destroy the thing'. This is clearly heard on 'Discipline 8', where a steady horn theme is maintained at all costs despite the lack of a pulse from the rhythm section (the drums are all over the place), while a sax is permitted to blast freely on the top line, along with some gorgeous organ interpolations from Ra. When you're aware of what they're trying to do, you realise how miraculous it is. The main track 'Discipline 27-11' takes up an entire side - it's another space chant, wherein Ra sees through the hollow shell of life on earth, speaking like a

Gospel preacher who knows of a truer, more vibrant existence. 'Life is not like this shadow-world, this world of illusion.'

Bewildering sleeve art, where long hair of Africans turns into solar prominences and long-necked faces emerge from the globe of the sun, their fingers toying with the planet Saturn. This issue appears to be a straight copy of the Saturn original.



Sun Ra Vs Dan and Dale (The Jazz Garage Vault Volume One)

CANADA MAGIC CITY RECORDS MC
78002 VINYL LP (ND)

Insiders are also adopting a cool distanced attitude from this jolly record, notorious for years on the collector circuit as 'Sun Ra's Batman LP'. The original issue on Tifton Record Company was called *Batman and Robin*, and credited to The Sensational Guitars of Dan and Dale. Sun Ra's name is nowhere on the cover, and it remained anonymous for some time, even within the cognoscenti collector world and into the 1990s; you could scoop a record dealer who thought it was just some cheap 1960s cash-in record.

Which is, of course, exactly what it is. Ra took key members of his band and joined Al Kooper, Steve Katz, Danny Kalb, Andy Kulberg and Roy Blumenfeld (The Blues Project before they were famous - then willing to play as session musicians) for a non-union studio gig in New Jersey in 1966, to play Neal Hefti's *Batman* theme and any other instrumental music they could get their hands on that was non-copyright, including fragments by Chopin and Tchaikovsky. It was produced by Tom Wilson, MGM house producer and man behind the controls for The Velvet Underground and The Mothers of Invention.

This kinda shows how Ra was willing to take on almost any gig he was offered, although I understand he was far from happy being put in that situation. Although the result is an extremely atypical entry in the massive Ra catalogue, I very much care for it - it is simple, unaffected beat music (lots of twangy surf guitars!), almost innocent. This reissue arrives with informative sleeve notes but a rather downbeat cover - a black and white photo of Ra and band in the studio. *Batman and Robin* are printed in negative, in black on dark grey, barely visible; it's as if the producers were 'ashamed' of the pop-art brashness of the original cover, which sported a fine comic strip illustration of The Caped Crusader. However, there is now another reissue available on the Italian Universe label, which is an exact copy and reinstates the original sleeve art.



Sun Ra and His Solar Myth Arkestra

Life is Splendid

USA TOTAL ENERGY RECORDS
NER3026 VINYL LP (1999)

Sun Ra and His Intergalactic Arkestra Outer Space Employment Agency

USA TOTAL ENERGY RECORDS
NER3021 VINYL LP (1999)

A couple of gems fairly easy to pick up on vinyl as we write, and both essential. Neither of these were LPs released in Ra's lifetime, but are rescued from John Sinclair's private archive of tapes and constitute another piece in the jigsaw puzzle of the Ann Arbor free jazz / underground rock axis. Both were recorded at the Ann Arbor Blues & Jazz Festival in 1972 and 1973 respectively, of which John Sinclair was artistic director and co-producer; he first brought the Arkestra there in 1969, and invited them back several times. Influences on the MC5 were soon to follow, not least their live version of Ra's 'Rocket Number Nine'.

Life Is Splendid is one of the greatest recordings of live music I have ever heard. Warm? Brother, it's an excoriating BLAST of flame - a solar prominence from the great globe! All the numbers are taken at twice the usual tempo, as though the Arkestra sense the end of the world is nigh and only have a few moments left to communicate these vital facts we need for our continued survival. The sense of urgency is there from the kick-off, the normally sedate 'Enlightenment' played at breakneck speed, followed by a funky reworking of 'Love In Outer Space' where organ and congas dominate. Then the utterly wild playing on 'Space Is The Place', which culminates in bizarre ULULATIONS of the mouth, throat and tongue from the Space Ethnic Voices wing of the Arkestra. If feeling cautious, bring yer own fire extinguisher. If not, surrender to the music, allow your domicile to burn to the ground and toast muffins in the ashes. You'll be glad you did.

Side 2 is another long space chant, another variant of 'Discipline 27-11' (see above) and stating the same themes - Sun Ra reels in amazement at the follies of mankind, and the negativity into which we have sunk. 'What planet is this?' he demands in patrician tones, 'Is this a planet of life or death?' As usual, the singers echo his every phrase. 'They call this LIFE???' he explodes, and the Arkestra join in his cosmic laughter - a laughing clarinet starts off a riot among the rest of the reeds. The aliens from Saturn are laughing at us!

Outer Space Employment Agency is from another Ann Arbor concert, and includes another Discipline composition. Not quite as great sound quality on this, but far from being a rip-off boot...side two contains a 20 minute cosmic workout, a long instrumental in four titled sections. It starts out with 'At First There Was Nothing', pitching the fantastic bowed bass of Ronnie Boykins against Ra's Farfisa organ. The sound of the creation itself as told by The Arkestra. The sax section joins in as evolution progresses, and freak out. The piece ends with a mournful melody played by the entire combo.

Both these releases come with excellent sleeve art, full-colour photos by Leni Sinclair of the Arkestra in their stage gear. My favourite images include those of Ra with a black-velvet tunic adorned with images of Saturn, stars and comets...and a backstage shot where Ra stands (in front of suitcases) with the red and gold INFINITY banner unfurled.



Amiri Baraka / The Sun Ra Myth-Science Arkestra

The Black Mass

USA SON BOY RECORDS 1 CD (1999)

A delightful monstrosity which I feel honour-bound to recommend to you all. Quite some way from a Sun Ra LP proper, this is an aural document of an experimental black theatre play written by Imamu Amiri Baraka (ie

LeRoi Jones, the poet and journalist who produced much excellent jazz literature, published within the collections *Black Music* and *Blues People*). In 1965, when he wrote this play, Baraka was heavily under the influence of the Nation of Islam. The story he tells here - which I won't encapsulate in detail, or you may never buy the thing - of Jacob the insane Black Scientist, was fetched back from Malcolm X at a time when the latter was still influenced by Elijah Muhammad. Suffice to say it's an ingenious piece of counter myth-making and revolutionary sloganeering that puts 'Whitey' in his place.

Sun Ra was highly supportive of The Black Arts Repertory Theatre School at that time, and, according to Baraka, the experience helped add a political and Black Nationalist dimension to his music. For the first performance of *A Black Mass* in Newark (May 1966), Sun Ra and the Arkestra provided music. The record you hear is not the original play, but a specially staged event - a 1968 studio re-recording of the original stage play by Baraka with his friends and

future wife, for which The Sun Ra Myth-Science Arkestra also added a musical backdrop. The finished product is not perhaps brilliantly recorded, but it has scads of atmosphere - the drama and music work together in an effective combo that literally sparkles with tension; the indignant rage of Baraka, which gives plenty of answers, is countered by the sweet music of Ra - which asks lots of pertinent questions.

A very obscure entry in the Ra canon, and one which for a while was only rumoured to exist. It was originally released on the Jihad label. The Son Boy Records label is intending to release the entire Jihad back catalogue, including a rare performance by Albert Ayler and Pharoah Sanders.



Sun Ra and His Intergalactic Infinity Arkestra The Night Of The Purple Moon

'EL SATURN'522 VINYL LP (ND)

Recorded in 'living stereo'. For sheer exuberance and standards of

excellence in the studio, check out this gorgeous small combo for Ra's version of cocktail lounge jazz. An utter charmer. It's a four piece with John Gilmore 'guesting' on the drums, besides usual saxes. Ra plays the Roksichord, mostly, though some of the tracks have added Moog Synthesizer overdubs. Early in his career, Szwed reports, 'he might be led into a composition by the peculiarities of one or another type of keyboard - celeste, piano, organ, Solovox - which produced a specific feeling that he could use'. The friendly vibe he got from the Roksichord - probably an electronic

keyboard that emulates the sound of a harpsichord - is written all over this record. Incredible sleeve art that plugs into the Egyptian myth and shows Ra flying next to the Sphinx, his cape turning into solar prominences.



Sun Ra and His Arkestra The Other Side of the Sun ITALY UNIVERSE UV 017 VINYL LP (2001)

Five straight-ahead jazz pieces (including two standards) recorded in 1978 and 1979 in NYC studio dates. Has a 'solid' version of 'Space Is The Place'. Great music, but not one if you're only interested the 'out' sound of the Arkestra. Several 'out' LPs were released that year, including *Laquidity*, *I Pharaoh*, *Disco 3000* and *Sound Mirror*; so perhaps this is an odd choice...but it's a fine pressing on heavy vinyl with a fine cover painting of the man in his turban. An exact reissue of the original, issued on Sweet Earth.



Sun Ra and His Astro Infinity Arkestra Strange Strings 'EL SATURN RECORDS' 502 VINYL LP (ND)

What a dilemma. You *have* to hear this absolutely exceptional record, yet it's impossible to get hold of. The original Saturn LP - as with most Saturns, which are now the exclusive property of rich men and mad collectors - forget it. Even this unofficial reissue from New York vanished in nothing flat and I had to pay a collector's price to get it. The other side of the dilemma is that once heard, *Strange Strings* tends to devalue any other records in your collection. One taste of this magic brew and you simply can't settle for anything less potent ever again. A Pandora's box, a genie in a bottle. If Sun Ra had only made this record and none others, this alone should guarantee his immediate canonisation as a holy saint of music.

It starts with 'Worlds Approaching', a sinister, unsettling sound - gloriously so. Tympani drums announce it, a 6/8 time bass figure propels it along. Ra's electric piano is slightly distorted, and there's echo on some of the wind instruments, making the oboe sound particularly bizarre. Brass sections and flute sections call in, take wing, and fly out. The primitive echo effect had been used with success since *When Angels Speak of Love* was recorded in 1963, and the engineer accidentally on purpose plugged his microphone into the output socket.

The remainder of the LP - one and half sides - is 'Strange Strings' proper. It's a delirious



combination of plucking, scraping and bowing, against sheet metal sound and lightning drums. There's percussion, and all the sounds bleed and leak into each other. It was recorded exceptionally loud. In some of the gaps, a weird intoning voice (Art Jenkins, named here as 'Thlan Aldridge') bellows down a steel megaphone and adds that extra in-human touch that literally chills you to the very core of yer marrow. I once thought *Cosmic Tones For Mental Therapy* was the last word in how eerie the Arkestra could be. Here is a new benchmark. I never thought music could sound so utterly *alien*.

How the hell did this come about? Ra found some stringed instruments at antique shops, among them ukelele, koto, mandolin and Chinese lute, and decreed that the horn and reed players in The Arkestra should play them - stringed instruments they had never played before, with which they were not familiar, and make music on them. Lesser men would have generated an inept cacophony. The Arkestra accepted the challenge, and turned a hindrance into a discipline, forced their voices to speak in new tongues. It was a 'study in ignorance'. There were also home-made instruments, including a large sheet of metal with an X engraved in it. The recording was entirely improvised, and Ra directed the work by simply pointing at the musicians when he wanted them to play. With all that steel around - steel drums, steel megaphone, steel strings - the musicians were coming close to becoming metal men, early forms of cyborg. One bleak vision of the future which Ra didn't care to explore any further.

Although this experiment was a one-off, and comes over like an insane gamble, I think Ra instinctively knew it was something that would pay off. For one glorious session, a radical redirection of his band's energies was achieved; Ra already knew about how to tap into these hidden resources, and knew that The Arkestra would come up trumps. You hear the noise of their own alienation and unfamiliarity, sure, but you also hear incredible music. *Strange Strings* is without doubt a completely unprecedented work of art, perhaps one of the most significant artistic statements of the 20th century. Originally released in 1967; a proper reissue is long overdue.



Faust

The Wümme Years 1970-73

UNITED KINGDOM RER MEGACORP ReR
FB1 5 x CD BOX (2000)

What can I tell you that isn't obvious? Faust were an important, seminal and revolutionary band, but their obscure history is becoming more well known and I shouldn't repeat it here in much detail. Chris Cutler, the boss behind ReR Megacorp, has personally kept the Faust flame burning ever since Faust toured with Henry Cow in the 1970s. In 1979, Cutler licensed the Faust LPs from Polydor and reissued them on his Recommended Records label. These reissues were done with immense care and were exact copies of the original records. A contemporary advert, appealing for subscriptions to the reissues of *Faust* and *Faust So Far*, from an old issue of *Impetus* magazine, will indicate Cutler's mission statement at this time: *'These records are pressed to the highest classical standards and we have done everything we can to ensure the highest quality at every stage of the process. This practice ought to be normal...we have chosen these two records because we think they are among the most significant of the decade and they have been unavailable for much too long (they are already selling for £40+ in France and the USA, which is crazy).'*

He should only have known then what would happen to the LP collector's market! Even those reissues are rare now, let alone Faust originals. Cutler went further and rescued other unissued rehearsal tapes from Faust's 1970s sessions, putting them out as *Faust Party*, *The Last LP* and *Munic and Elsewhere*, some with limited edition screenprinted covers. Selections from these were rehashed into the *71 Minutes Of* compilation CD. This present collection is a comprehensive collection of all the material Faust recorded at the Wümme studios between 1970 and 1973: *Faust* (aka 'Faust Clear' by fans), *Faust So Far*, and the unsurpassed *The Faust Tapes* - at last with a track listing! Along with the material mentioned above, there's also the 1973 BBC Radio sessions, and unreleased material.

All the discs are remastered and frankly have never sounded better. The superb packaging, which features 'remixes' of the original sleeve art by Savage Leisurecentre, proposes triumphant solutions to the restrictions of the CD format. The booklet contains rare photos and interviews, conducted by Cutler, with members of the band Jean-Hervé Peron and Joachim Irmiler, Peter Blegvad (who played with them in Wümme and on tour in the UK), the engineer Kurt Graupner, and Uwe Nettelbeck himself - who, although he has always been supportive to Cutler's reissue projects, has never uttered on the history; he's breaking his silence on Faust for the first time.

There are several ways of looking at the bizarre mythology of Faust, and the way the interviews are arranged encourages a certain ambiguity. From a practical angle, you have a situation so chaotic it's amazing anything came out of it. Uwe Nettelbeck, a left-wing journalist and a music and film critic of no small fame, had been commissioned by Polydor Germany to put a band together. The label had just lost The Beatles and were looking for a money-maker. This was at a time when rock was still big business, and the money men were carelessly doling out enormous budgets. Can had started and the idea of potentially successful German Rock Bands was in the air. Never a man to think small, Nettelbeck put his ear to the ground and forged Faust out of members of two separate German underground bands; those on Peron's side were associated with a young avant-garde cinema scene. Using Polydor's money to sponsor it, Nettelbeck set up the Wümme studios, and enlisted the help of talented engineer Kurt Graupner, who migrated from Deutsche Gramophone and brought his equipment and his radical ideas. The hippy-genius musicians of Faust - Peron, Zappi Diermaier, Joachim Irmiler, Arnulf Meinert, Rudolf Sosna, and Gunther Wüsthoff - were let loose in this playground. Nettelbeck remains good-humoured today as he reminisces about the excesses of Faust as they wasted Polydor's moolah; they would sleep all day, lie in the sun, smoke lots of dope, crash cars, walk around naked, and allegedly provide sanctuary to

QUID MULTA?

Ship on a better sea. Don't Take Roots.

J'ai Mal Aux Dents. We are the Hallo Men.

F•A•U•S•T



members of the terrorist Baader-Meinhof group (this story isn't here, incidentally). The first six months, spent not at the studio but at the home of Nettelbeck's (wealthy) wife Petra Krause, were pissed away in this playful spirit. They might have appeared less than committed to delivering the promised records on time.

Of course, it's this very irresponsibility that is the essence of Faust; it's their madness, their fire, that makes the records so brilliantly insane and unexpected - even today. Besides, once they were in the studio, it was total music production non-stop; they lived, ate, slept, toke dope and probably even fucked girls in the studio. They insisted on total independence and the freedom to create as they wished. There was a political side to their freedom-at-all costs agenda, which led to the inclusion of a recording of a political demonstration on their demo tape for Polydor; they liked the joke of a demonstration on a demo. Even the name Faust was chosen for its twofold protest implications; they saw signing up to a 'capitalist' record company as no different to selling your soul to the devil, as the original Dr Faustus had. 'Faust' means 'fist' in German, so the X-Ray image (concocted by artist Andy Hertel) of the raised fist was translated into a radical power salute.

It's much to the credit of Kurt Graupner - who was something of a 'straight' compared to the deranged hippies he had to work with, and found himself despised on occasion - that he managed to concretise the playing of these untogether loon-boons into such powerful recorded statements. It's to do with making ideas where there are no ideas. Graupner had his legendary 'black boxes', effects pedals filled with tone and pulse generators and ring modulators, and right from the start developed the idea of continuous, live modification of the sound. The musicians could instantly modify what they were playing, and that of the others, live in the studio; the variations led to further variations. Evil, constantly-mutating, interactive results; one of the

The Sound 9rojector Ninth Issue 2001

cornerstones of Faust music.

It's also to Nettelbeck's credit that he maintained enough momentum to realise the release of the records, and persuaded the band to play a showcase concert at the Musikhalle. This went horribly wrong; they got the idea of an ambitious surround-sound system using 20 Dynacord speakers, perhaps not unaware of Stockhausen's ideas in that area. But the technology failed, and the venue failed, and they weren't able to deliver much more than a shambles. But the audience still have happy memories of it, and the shambolic approach was carried forward into the UK tours involving the TV sets, pinball machines, and pneumatic drills on stage. (The sort of shock tactics which, when attempted in the 1990s in London, was merely an exercise in nostalgia and pandering to the already clued-up audience. When people arrive *expecting* to be shocked, how can the situation progress? The 1990s model of Faust simply upped the ante and tried pouring on extra violence, to little or no effect.)

Faust remained obdurate and unco-operative when signed to Virgin Records in the UK, but that obduracy wasn't a one-way street. No-one here has a kind word for Richard Branson. The Manor studios failed to offer the same freedom as their experimental laboratory in Wümmen, even though Graupner had been promised total control. More dope was consumed. Faust wasted Virgin's money the same way they wasted Polydor's, and were thrown in jail for non-payment of an expensive hotel bill. *Faust IV*, the record that resulted, is not part of this boxed set. Joachim Irmiler, the organ player, was disgusted by the way things went at this point, and (shortly before leaving the band) made a passionate appeal to his fellow players to recall their misty origins, where it appears they made some dark Faustian pact at midnight while communing with Germanic tree-spirits. This is one of the few glimpses anyone has ever given into the truly deranged nature

of this band. *'Hell and night must give this monstrous birth to the world's light'.*

In spite of all the anarchy and mayhem, it's fair to state that the Faust project succeeded admirably; and not just because of the essential musical documents that remain. Did you realise the first LP sold 20,000 copies? Of course, that wasn't anything like the amount Polydor wanted - who were expecting something in the millions - but it compares favourably with today's etiolated experimental music scene. Many CDs sent to *The Sound Projector* are in editions of 500, although this is something to do with flooding the market; too many artists and labels chasing after too small an audience.

Also here in this box, to a certain extent, are fragments of the Wümmen Studio story - it was home to interesting experimental music. Works were recorded there by Anthony Moore, Slapp Happy, Tony Conrad, the American band Moon, and Dieter Meier (who later became Yello). Faust were involved to varying degrees in these projects, as you'll know if you have heard the original Slapp Happy LPs and Conrad's *Outside The Dream Syndicate*. Blegvad and Moore enjoyed Faust's contributions; Tony Conrad didn't relish the experience much, and tried to overpower their rock sound with his mighty droning violin.

Quid multa? I assume if you're reading this then you already have all these records. I know I do, but I still bought them again. If you haven't, then here's your chance to get five crucial discs, and a big slice of important history, via a single purchasing action.

ED PINSENT

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Music from JAPAN

Strange satellites fly past

Haco

Happiness Proof
UNITED KINGDOM RER
MEGACORP ReR HACO2 CD
(2000)

An essential and beautiful collection of songs from this Japanese genius. Her After Dinner project from the 1980s was great, but it was the chrysalis only hinting at the butterfly she has become by 2001. She has a fine voice which is brought to the front of the mix on these ten recordings, mostly written, arranged and performed by Haco. For backing, she favours spare and simple arrangements, and feeds experimental methods into her song structures - loops, samples, noise and turntabling. It's like Portishead (I imagine) without any of the fey preciousness. She was joined in the studio in 1998 and 1999 by a small army of sidemen, mostly Japanese guitarists, drummers and turntables (some of them quite famous, from Japanese underground bands), and there's a rare appearance by European crank-inventor musician, Pierre Bastien. None of these blokes dominate; their contributions are relegated to small doses.

Haco's breathy voice delivers batches of elusive lyrics; the songs concern introverted perceptions of the world, intuitive reactions, dreams, half-glimpsed faces and half-formed thoughts. These fleeting concepts are expressed through simple, strong images; colours, lights, and lots of nature imagery, in particular weather, water, and the night skies. While she never gets as mawkish as Scott Walker, she's attempting in these elegant miniatures to do the same as he, and express the inexpressible. The resulting songs are as hard to pin down as a translucent butterfly.

From the pseudo-reggae rhythm of 'Fluid of Wisdom' and the glorious long folk-psych anthem 'Feather Time, there's scads of invention here - and unexpected combinations of melodies with backing tracks that don't seem to fit at first, yet by the end of the song have resolved themselves into perfection. 'Starry Night' has a slow ballad-styled melody that seems at

M e d i t a t e A TRANSLUCENT BUTTERFLY



odds with the speedy, almost funky guitar rhythm that backs it. On 'Invisible Fireworks', you're moving in three incongruous directions at once, and it's amazing that it coheres into a song at all. 'World's Art Festa' is the most startling in that area; full of deep contrasts and shocking (for her) dynamics. It's a narrative in broken images of Haco's impressions from an art fair, pretentious utterances and overlapping voices competing for her attention, and adding to her very real confusion.

Yes, she's gifted with a rare ingenuity; but it's the emotion that's up front, in the voice and the delivery. She has a child's simple joy; she has profound but dignified sadness. Mostly she has an inscrutable longing that nothing can fulfill. What's impressive is how she makes it all sound so effortless.

Having seen her on stage, she is utterly natural; songs just seem to fall out of her body, and not just her mouth; her small dance movements help to birth each new tune. A genius of natural expression. *Happiness Proof* is a record everyone must hear.

ED PINSENT

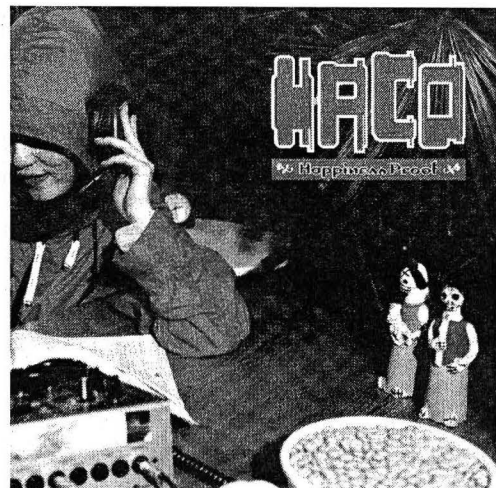
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Boredoms Vision Creation Newsun

USA BIRDMAN BMR028CD CD
(2000)

Like sweet rain on a parched desert. The new Boredoms album brings blessed relief to those of us who thirst for something more than the Death Valley spirit-sapping tedium of DJ sessions, pseudo-intellectual knob twiddlers, deluded art-pharts and Radiohead copyists.

Yamantaka Eye and the boys have certainly come a long way from the manic puppet show of albums like *Chocolate Synthesizer*. '99's *Super AE* was big on sound, long on riffs and drones and suggested a new, more



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'considered' tone for the band. This album sees them reach up, rip open the sky and pull down sound from the cosmos itself. Yes, it's sprawling. It's as wide as the Crab Nebula and just as vivid, sucking in space rock clichés through the black hole of their own aesthetic and loosing something out of the other side that is unlike anything you've ever heard. Reference points such as Can, Hawkwind and Tangerine Dream offer some clues for the unprepared, but even those influences are stripped of their old rags and dressed in the gaudy colours that Boredoms have always preferred.

The theme of 'creation' and 're-birth' imbues the whole album with joy and possibility, which is in marked contrast to the rackfuls of moaning and whimpering to be found in your local record shop. Restraint on the once familiar Boredoms indulgences – jumpcuts, samples dropped in at random, Eye's trademark lunghowl – allows the music and musicianship (important words, lest we forget) to shine through, proving once and for all just how adept these guys are. Their sheer ability might once have been swamped by the aural madness they delivered, but now it's clearly apparent, heightened further by a crystal clear and unobtrusive production job.

After a year of very few diamonds in the sonic shittpile, this is the biggest rock so far, as big as your head, as big as your heart, as big as you'll allow it to be, if you'll only LISTEN.

RIK RAWLING 16/05/2001

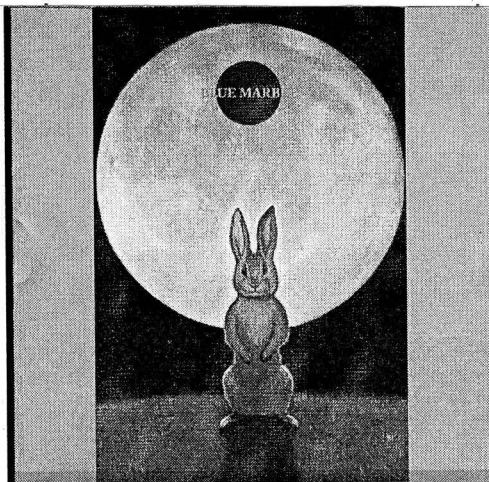
Koji Asano

The Last Shade of Evening Falls 1-4

SPAIN SOLSTICE 16, 17, 18, 19 4 x CD (2000)

A very long and continuous single work, spread over four CDs and over four hours in duration. There's no way anyone can pretend this is an easy one to get into, and whether it's something you want to spend money on, but you'll know in the first few seconds of hearing it whether you like it or not. I must stress Koji's created an utterly unique sound here, one which is extremely hard to identify; no presets, no familiar electronic noises, no readily identifiable brand of keyboard. There are two fundamental sounds - a very sweet droning and soaring tone, perhaps made from string samples; and a low, distorted queasy groaning sound that threatens to turn nasty at any second. Over four CDs, these two simple sonorities are pitched against each other, subtly mixed and remixed, with each struggling to gain control. To express what he has to express, Asano has this time chosen to do it by maximising the duration.

Across four colour-coded CDs (this is real tone painting!), the shades of evening unfold. As soon they're introduced on part one, a nostalgic and longing feeling falls over the listener and seeps gradually into the bones. The same bitter-sweet feeling that comes with the



month of September after a long hot summer. You grow used to the slowly shifting, ever-changing patterns of drone, and find the 'centre' of the work very elusive. The tone washes drift along like clouds, vast weather formations. But the groaning sound insists, and won't let you rest. By part two, a slight clarification process has taken place, a resolution that results in a cleaner and gentler texture. Sounds near the top of the mix are falling, and dying. By the third CD the studio processing has taken control, and the artist is leaving more gaps, more dynamics, adding subtle layers of effects and distortion. The groaning has been slightly smothered under a blanket of air, and is less continuous. Against the evening sky - for this is what this work is depicting - strange satellites fly past in a second, and vanish, like shooting stars. Part four sees the return of the groaning continuum, and the lovely string sounds which by now have reached a pitch of unbearable poignancy. The work has been a struggle between two forces, and it matches Ligeti for its microtonal qualities.

For all the numerous times I've been bed-ridden with the ague or influenza, I've found that the gradual passing of the day fills me with an impossible sadness. The winter sky turning from an empty slate grey to dark blue, then to black. How often do we go outside and look at the evening sky as it changes? We all need a lot more space, and time. Although we fear that urbanisation is separating us from nature, at least here is one young man who is never polluted by the

evils of urban blight. He can rise above it all and concoct a musical spell to reveal the simple beauties. This is the work of someone who learns about music from observing nature, not by fiddling with ProTools. The covers depict windows covered with the condensation of evening dew; in the same way, somehow we remain one step removed from the realities of nature, and through this gorgeous music, we experience it through a semi-transparent window of sound.

ED PINSENT

Koji Asano is interviewed this issue.

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Aiko Shimada

Blue Marble

USA TZADIK TZ 7281 CD (2001)

Pleasant enough set of, apparently, 'surrealist' songs from this Japanese singer and guitarist musician, now based in Seattle USA where she has built up a small following through her hypnotic live shows. On this record, she's occasionally bolstered by strings from producer Eyvind Kang, managing a latter-day Nico *Chelsea Girls* feeling. Akido would like to align herself with folk singer-songwriters like Joni Mitchell and Nick Drake. Akido's voice is thin, but when boosted with a smidgen of studio effect, it does have a kind of wistful, yearning melancholy which can be appealing. So, what is she getting so misty-eyed over? A song title like 'Busy Rabbit' sounds intriguing, but all the lyrics here are in Japanese so it's a bit hard to comment further. There is also a rabbit depicted on the cover standing in front of a full moon, but he doesn't appear to be very busy. If you don't lead a particularly busy life either, these songs might appeal to you too.

ED PINSENT

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NY 10003, USA

Ken Ikeda

Tzuki [Moon]

UNITED KINGDOM TOUCH T33.17 CD (2000)

A highly listenable excursion into the realms of resonant Eno-esque electronics. For this release, Ikeda works largely with music samples from film soundtracks, although you would hardly know it as, through intensive processing, he's erased all traces of his footsteps like an ice-sculptor working in the snow. His aim in any case is not some ironic comment on society through rehashing fragments of pop culture (so no *Apocalypse Now* dialogue samples here, thank heavens). Ken's aims are more high-minded, even mystical; he wants to communicate with the God of images, and by so doing, communicate with the past and try to say a holy mass for our ancestors. This could be a very futuristic take on aspects of traditional Japanese worship. There's liturgy embedded in these digital



tones. There's also a hymn to nature. Any one of these tracks, but especially 'Looking for the Moon', evoke the perfect frame of mind for contemplating natural phenomena, and dwelling on the holy mysteries. Sometimes it is so gorgeous that it could almost make you cry. This is the debut full-length CD from Ken Ikeda, who also featured in the Sonic Boom exhibition at the Hayward Gallery in London. One of the better recent releases from Touch and one that seems fully attuned to the mystical aspirations of that label.

ED PINSENT

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Nobukazu Takemura

Scope

USA THRILL JOCKEY THRILL 068 CD (1999)

With its pleasant and often playful moods, plus a good balance of experimental and more traditional song-derived elements throughout its 60 minutes of play, it's small wonder that Takemura's *Scope* rated as one of 1999's best releases. It's the kind of CD that really offers something for everyone, whether it's the joyful feeling of 'Icefall', the cheekiness of 'Taw' or the bounciness of the appropriately named 'On a Balloon'. Forget any insinuations of selling out to the lowest common denominator. With *Scope*, there's no suggestion that Takemura is trying to be everything to everyone, though he may be a very canny operator who knows what buttons and switches to push.

The first 3 tracks (of 5 in total) are the best. The loveliest is 'Kepler', featuring a female voice overlaying a liquid run of electronic tones. Takemura maintains your attention with one of the oldest tricks in the book: changing key about halfway through the piece with a resultant darkening of the mood and then switching back to the original key for the finale. Not the most original way of keeping a tune going, I agree, but didn't The Beatles make an entire career of this? And no-one complained about that! It's a most effective technique as the changes in key seem to cast a reflective shadow over the rest of 'Kepler', even after it returns to its original sparkling mood.

The zany 'Taw' follows with a series of burps, splurts, fumbles and other noises that'd probably make your grandmother blush. The track barely seems to hang together but there's enough repetition of those cheeky noises to hold it up (and they do grow on you too). 'On a Balloon' is the longest track, but there's always something new happening throughout and at the 13th minute, the music enters noisier Mego territory of glitches and rumbles.

This CD does an excellent job of meshing together mainstream pop elements and experimental leanings. I'd have thought the likes of Mille Plateaux (home of the superior Neina) and similar-minded European labels would have stampeded to Mr Takemura's place to release this CD, but instead Thrill Jockey (home of so-called post-rockers like

Tortoise, The Sea and Cake and the ho-hum Trans Am) has nabbed him. What we might call the luck(?) of the game.

JENNIFER HOR

Thrill Jockey, PO Box 476794, Chicago IL, 60647, USA

Kazumoto Endo

While you were out

USA BOXMEDIA / PHILOSOPHY SHOP RECORDS BOXCD11 / KANT008 (1999)

While people like Kazumoto Endo exist, the future of Japanese noise looks bright and assured. Endo's particular assault on noise has a steely scrap metal sound which can seem a little tinny towards the end and he sends out his sonic blasts in more or less measured doses so that you never really feel overwhelmed - the most you might feel is a pile of garbage bin lids crashing on top of you. Some of the music can be a bit overwhelming, especially when Endo decides to mix disco tunes ('Itabashi Girl'), thrashy cymbals ('Shinjuku Kahki Pants' [sic]), traditional Japanese singing and a recording of a girl giving a speech ('Night falls in Ikebukuro'), pop tunes and field recordings in with the cacophony. On some tracks, particularly 'Evergreen', our man demonstrates an effective use of space,

tradition of Merzbow with loads of metallic bashing.

Hmm...many of the tracks have titles bearing the names of shopping and entertainment districts in Tokyo (I've never set foot in Japan but I understand that Roppongi is an area in Tokyo once famous for its hostess bars) so perhaps Endo is describing shopping and nightlife in Tokyo, in his own way. If this is the case, then you have all been warned. On the other hand, if we can buy giant ducks like the ones featured on the back cover, maybe shopping in Tokyo is not such an ordeal after all. Watch out for those garbage bin lids!

JENNIFER HOR

BOXmedia, www.boxmedia.com
Philosophy Shop Records, 1416 March St, Kalamazoo, MI 49001, USA

Akemi Ishijima

Time Drops

UNITED KINGDOM PARADIGM PD 13 CD (2000)

A short but substantial and completely satisfying burst of electro-acoustic composition from this modern Japanese artist. Title work from year 2000 is minimal percussion bowls a-striking, and calling the devout Buddhist to prayer. It's quiet and meditative, and would best suit an undisturbed concentrated listen at 6AM on some warm summer's morn. The earlier work 'Ab Ovo' from 1993 contains more startling treatments of sound. It sparkles, rings and echoes like a slow-motion catherine wheel. In places it veers a tad too close to Empreintes Digitales area for my liking, frequently deploying that fine 'watery' effect that resembles an electronic whirlpool, which while enjoyable, has grown almost over-familiar. Well, to regular listeners of electronic music it has. I almost find my attention drifting away at times. However the closing three minutes of 'Ab Ovo' remain triumphant as the piece gathers momentum and suddenly accretes infinite layers of extremely loud and extremely dense sound. A fitting music for Judgement Day, as it might be. So this is what

Gabriel's trumpets will sound like, mingled with the roaring of the damned souls being loosed from Hell as Christ knocks at the iron gates.

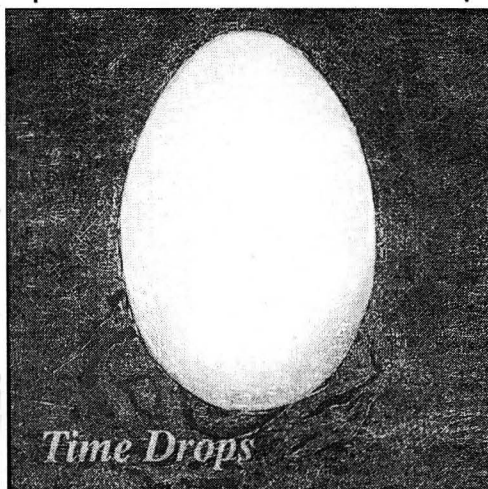
To decorate this package, Clive 'Mr Paradigm' Graham has selected and reproduced two very fitting 'egg' images by Jude James for our visual pleasure. The front cover is a tempera egg painting - what neat conceptual unity!

ED PINSENT

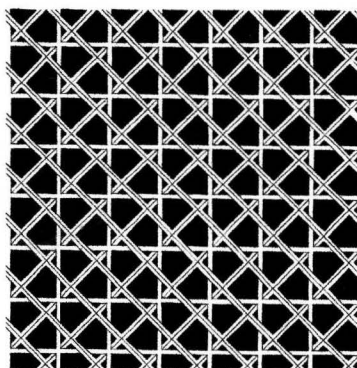
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More Japanese Music can be found in
ATOMS OF PURE NOISE

And this issue's ONKYO OVERVIEW
And Otomo's Austria compilation CD



volume and the dynamics of the sound to create sculptured pieces of controlled chaos; he also has an ear for rhythm, especially rhythm of the pile-driving kind, on 'Evergreen' and the title track. And he still manages to unleash 'Boom Boom Roppongi' which combines head-cleaning assaults in the



Japanorama

London QEH 17th January 2001

Oxford Playhouse 19th January 2001

Brief Impressions of
two concerts by Ed
Pinsent

QEH First half A brief blast from the large combo, led by Otomo opening by crashing a cymbal onto turntable.	Taku Sugimoto, Toshimaru Nakamura, Ishikawa Ko the sho player, percussionist Furuta Mari, and koto player all droning on a single note.	Followed by solo turns from the above. Toshi on "feedbacks". Sho player (magnificent). Ghost of a gorgeous melody from Taku. Yagi Michiyo Koto player (magnificent).	Haco closes first half with noises from a jar, and songs. Grace and elegance..	Second half Opens with intense no-sample sampler from Sachiko M. Suggested movement of head to capture harmonics.	Yasukatsu Oshima Traditional shanshin player - shanshin with song, then ditto with percussion backing (bowed xylophone), then solo vox. 
Cathode finish set, a simultaneous performance of a composition by Taku and one by Cathode. Intensive focussed minimal electronics with percussion, koto, guitars...and barely any movement from the players.	Red and yellow screen tapeworks from Keita Egami the visual artist. 		OXFORD Evening kicks off with brilliant feedbacks from Toshi, in turquoise light. 	Yagi Michiyo Koto player's fingers dance up a storm.	Otomo abuses his turntable arm - raises chuckles - and good-naturedly asks audience to be quiet. Feedback - violin bow on tonearm - cymbals. Short.
Taku joined by Otomo and Toshi for a stunning three-piece guitar composition. Discipline. Simplicity. Beauty.	Haco closes first half again with gorgeous songs - sheer confidence in delivery - yet very throwaway - zen simplicity in lyrics - "A mosquito land on my nose" - and with Yagi M also, half of Hoahio. Drums samples triggered by foot pedals. Tiny miniature keypad on music stand generates simple tones.	Second half - more headphones from Sachiko - head moving, audience participation, called 'flesh dub' by Ed Baxter.	Yasukatsu Oshima: shanshin player exact same set, tho' this time with Otomo on minimal electronics to back up.	Closing number by Cathode, a new improvisation. Feedbacks with sampler; guitars Taku and Otomo; percussion; koto.	Orange geometric pattern in tapes by visual artist. 

WHY THIS SO GREAT Power through simplicity. Real emotion and love of music. Sharing and playing together. The excitement of improv and none of the British stuffiness about it. No jazz influence anywhere. Discipline. Invention. Purity. In comparison even Mego too cluttered.	WHY THIS MATTERS Audiences in both venues won over - loved it. Will do so if given the chance. Deep underground music - misunderstood and ignored in Japan virtually. From tiny audiences in a cramped bar in Tokyo to larger audiences across Europe. 	OF INTEREST Move from 'noisy' to 'quiet' - path taken by Taku. Toshi moved from guitar to something less familiar. How many artists make this sacrifice? Combination of modern with the traditional works so perfectly 
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ONKYO

Brief Notes by Ed Pinsent

In 1999 Otomo Yoshihide told this magazine about new Japanese Musicians like Taku Sugimoto, 'playing very quietly', and associated with a 'scene' around the Bar Aoyama in Tokyo. Intrigued, especially since seeing Otomo and Taku playing beautifully together around that time; a little collection of recorded material has now accumulated at Sound Projector HQ. But the best thing is to see this music live - and hence my enraptured response to the fantastic Japanorama tour of the UK in 2001 (thanks to Ed Baxter, Paul Hood, Mick Ritchie et al).

The 'playing very quietly' is indeed one feature, but only one of many...Toshimaru and Sachiko M can be far from quiet, but they are extremely minimal. If you're familiar with the Japanese 'underground' music scene of the 1990s, one thing that unites all the music from the screaming of the dark lord Haino, to the psychedelic explosions of Marble Sheep, and the punkoid dementia of Boredoms and Hanatarash - is *loud volume*. Both Toshimaru and Taku made a deliberate decision to distance themselves from that particular excess; the former gave up the guitar completely, while the latter carried on playing it, just more quietly. But then, this is just a journalist's 'angle' on the situation; there's no real opposition to the ultra-loud extremes of Haino, Masonna and Merzbow, is there?

It's also easy to pull the lazy journalism trick of calling this a 'scene', and parcelling people up into nice neat groups. Already however, these players are diversifying and each is developing their own distinctive voices through collaborations across America and Europe (though not the UK much, sadly), and solo sets, and contributions to compilations. A lot of documentation is building up, all of it worth investigating...

A philosophy

This music is far from being 'Nothing Music'. The minimalism of Bernhard Günter and Francisco López is largely a conceptual exercise intended to reduce the range of options available within electronic sound manipulation. This is more than welcome, especially at a time when there appear to be simply *too many* sounds available for use and consumption - the air is thick with them. However, the minimalistic approach can also be a reductionist one, as it comes close to eliminating the role of the artist as a player - reducing that role to a clever exhibitor of ideas. Onkyo, by contrast, is all about *playing* music; we're back to the old-fashioned idea of gestural movements. It seems to open out the range of options, and thereby *empower* the listener (rather than trap us in a narrow web of rules). Playing quietly and simply is a discipline. The musician can create something that contains everything within one simple, portable and memorable sound, just as Samuel Beckett managed to contain entire universes within a single memorable (and striking) image.

Duration

Long duration in performance is required to make the discipline work, to allow the music to unfold. However, each passing second can contain the entire work. The pieces sound as though they aren't developing much, or moving very quickly. But it is a good place to remain in for a long time. We aren't talking the Hemingway-esque approach of an American Minimalist, who requires you to stay the whole 15 rounds with his music (if you don't, you're some kinda wuss). The music is not something being played *at* you; it's something happening and you're invited to share in it.

Minimal

Some modern musicians adopt the 'minimal' as it seems to mean less work for them. Such cynics can end up cheating themselves, and their audiences, with their lazy ideas, their formulaic sounds, and their sheer lack of craft. They use pretentiousness (in language, sleeve art and interviews) to cloak this lack

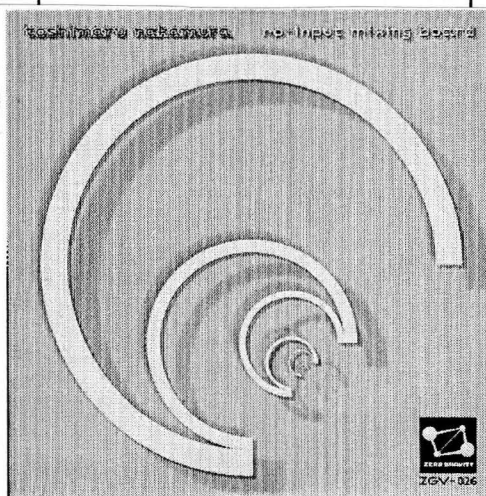
of talent.

Onkyo is real work, and probably harder to do than performing like a guitar hero. Likewise, I suppose it demands more work from the listener too (as does all the best music anyhow). But it is natural and open work, and stands up to the most minute scrutiny. If you listen, I believe you will never be short-changed by these honest, talented musicians.

before you are swallowed by the Aoyama tunnel, you'll find a grey door on your left. This is Bar Aoyama. Usually no sign.

The above is Toshimaru's open invitation to come and listen in at the venue started by him, Taku Sugimoto and Tetuzi Akiyama in October 1998. This release came out on their 10 month anniversary. Here's a hand picked selection of recordings from the very earliest concerts and into 1999. It's a tiny venue - they can manage five players on stage, and about 20 people in the audience.

This quietly amazing record reveals that 'Onkyo' was not a fluke. A few like-minded souls started a revolution in secret, in a small bar in Tokyo, before a tiny audience.



Taku Sugimoto / Kevin Drumm

Den
FRANCE SONORIS SON-13 CD
(2000)

Distilled music, like clear alcohol. No impurities. Kevin Drumm joins Taku at Gallery Den in Tokyo for this 2000 recording. Taku on guitar, and guitar and electronics from Drumm. Music stripped to a few essential components, including feedback, amplifier hum, and the amplified sound of fingers hitting steel strings. The latter action can make as much 'noise' as the music. The instrument truly becomes an index of playing, sensitive to every caress from its player. Superlative interaction. When Drumm drones, Taku has an encyclopaedia of perfect responses inside his guitar at the ready. Instils a perfect feeling of calmness, of inner peace. You will forget to move in your chair, and stop breathing, in case you miss a single second of music. Of interest - mastered by Toshimaru at his studio.

28 rue du parlement ste catherine, 33000
Bordeaux, France

SOME RECORDS

Only a fool would respond to such quiet music with an excess of words. Let's keep it simple.

Various Artists

The Improvisation Meeting
at Bar Aoyama
JAPAN RESET 002 CD

'When you're in Tokyo, just get off the Yamanote line at Shibuya station, climb up a little hill on Roppongi-dori avenue and right

Taku Sugimoto

Italia

FRANCE A BRUIT SECRET 01 CD (2001)

Three long live tracks recorded in Bologna and Milan at the end of 2000. Slow meditative plucking motion; when strings in motion, he makes them 'squirm' by bending. A sudden, short burst of very loud feedback, but a strong humming tone. Not a noise. Next more fluid notes, slightly faster, recalling the glory days of electric Derek Bailey. More loud volume. A sudden fade to signify the end. This is only the first track.

Extremely deliberate. A composer, improviser and guitar player. Respectful, quiet, slow music results. His tones are always warm and friendly; he's not out to alienate, but to include. A listening conversationalist. Enigmatic, Taku's work is more a process of inquiry into music and sound, than a direct statement. Yet they are the right questions, asked by a seeker with a clear mind and strong ideas.

Toshimaru

Nakamura

No-Input

Mixing Board

JAPAN ZERO

GRAVITY ZGV-026 CD (2000)

Toshi creates tones out of pure feedback, doing it through a mixing desk. Significantly, the mixing desk is a DJ tool - a bit of modern culture here stripped of everything except the power source flowing through it. Out of invisible intangibles comes a glorious noise. Easy to put him in a box as 'the feedback man'; can he sustain and develop what might be a one-trick novelty act? I think so, because he is so involved and committed to the act of performance. As soon as he takes his place behind that box, you know he's playing it with the same deliberation as any instrument; he is full control of what comes out (ie the machine is not playing *him*) and he is aiming for some species of perfection, through purity. There is an enormous amount of energy trapped inside his box, but he only releases a tiny amount of it. This is his first released collection of studio experiments using the 'board'. Where live is pure, studio offers opportunity to overdub. But not to excess. Labyrinths of repeated phrases, dub effects, humming and oscillating tones. A diagram of music.

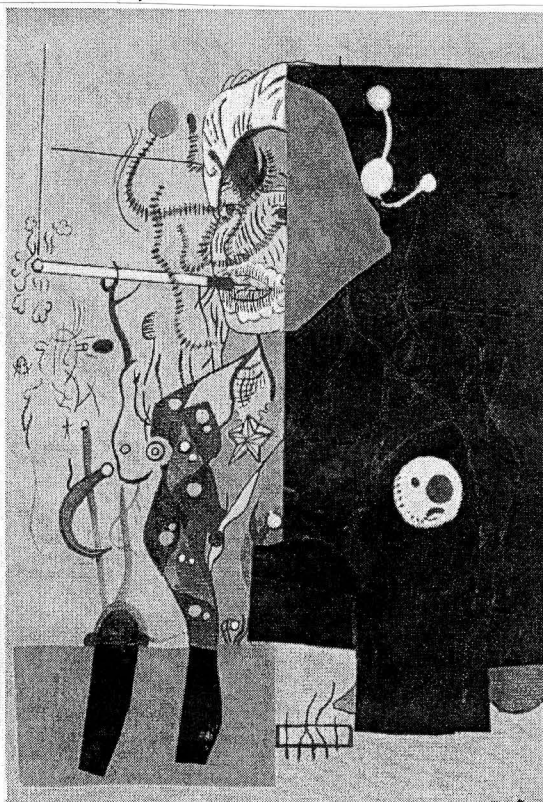
Toshimaru Nakamura

No-Input Mixing Board 2

FRANCE A BRUIT SECRET 02 CD (2001)

His second studio compilation, which is far more eventful than the one above. Perhaps a bit too eventful; too many notes, rhythms and sequencer loops for this purist listener. It might be mistaken for Cologne minimal techno, in places! Some of the loops sound like samples; I hope I'm mistaken as regards that. Still, the harsher and more intensive material is there towards the end, and very good it is too. Recorded in late 2000 and early 2001.

m_henrizzi@club-internet.fr



Repeat

Select Dialect

SWITZERLAND CUT RECORDS CUT 005 CD (2000)

Repeat is Toshimaru with the American percussionist Jason Kahn, out on Kahn's own label. Kahn has made some solo percussion records which we reviewed last ish. This is his second outing with Toshi, a studio date in France with Bob Drake at the control. Every bit as good as last year's release *Temporary Contemporary*. (I stupidly had the title mixed up with the name of the band last issue; and also stated Kahn is European, when he isn't - my apologies.) A very restrained and mysterious recording. Kahn adds electronics to the mix, besides drums and metal percussion; the two players are as perfect a matched pair as butter and parmesan cheese.

Otomo Yoshihide and

Sachiko M

Filament 1

AUSTRALIA EXTREME XCD 045 CD (1998)

PO Box 146, Preston 3071, Victoria, Australia

Sachiko M, Günter

Müller, Otomo

Yoshihide

Filament 2: Secret

Recordings

SWITZERLAND FOR 4 EARS RECORDS CD 1031 CD [1999]

Steinechtweg 16, CH-4452 Itingen, Switzerland

g.mueller@datacomm.ch

Just to bring everyone up to speed with these post Ground-Zero experiments of Otomo and his partner Sachiko Matsubara. The trio ISO also flourished around this time. Otomo can't take credit for inventing the 'Onkyo' scene, but he was there from the beginning and his slightly higher profile hasn't hurt to raise consciousness of the listening world. Sachiko plays her famous 'empty sampler', a sampling keyboard where she deleted all the presets and wiped all her memory disks. It plays pure sine waves. Surprisingly, her work is nothing like Toshi's and is somehow colder and more brutalist. She can fill a venue to the point of suffocation; your head is immersed in smothering sounds.

Of these two the Australian disc is extremely extreme, a number of shortish and inconsequential tracks recorded early in 1998. Most of this harsh music is little more than disconnected high tones, percussive chuntering blips, abrasive drones and mysterious little clicks. It's as though the pair of them decided to shut off from the world after years spent gorging themselves on fine French cuisine, and tried to exist for 6 months on a diet of roots. Of particular interest to hair-shirt types is the penultimate 9 minute silent track. I love the whole thing!

For the second *Filament* outing, they're joined by Euro-improvmeister Günter Müller who put this out on his own label. Recorded only a few months after the Australian disc, yet quite a different bucket of lobsters. Five much longer workouts, all of which grow substantially by the minute, and are more satisfying as improvisational statements. Otomo allows himself to go back to his beloved turntables, but uses them quietly and mostly just plays run-out grooves. Sachiko's empty sampler has something to react with when faced with Müller's unobtrusive electronical contributions. Very visceral, moaning music that exists on the periphery of your perception.

Thanks to Paul Hood who got me most (and more) of these records.

SHAUN ROBERT



V/A

HANDS 2000

HANDSPRODUCTIONS, HANDS BOI 2 (2000) (GERMANY)

(Double CD)

DURATION 76:31 / 74:18

Industrial white flame eat out unknown metal, from it ore. Transmitting, call & response. Rough techstep jungle/D+B. Very Retro - sometimes recalling TVOD. Blocks of stone fall in time lapse on the massive sheets of metal. It's blackmagic goin' on. Chains dance serpents to the stream of sound.

Bowing mystical triangles around the eyes peripheral vision. The dragon is summoned. A maggot brain yet to be born. End of the world stuff. Skin crawling with them, spitting them out of your mouth, digging them out of your ears. Man.

Cleansing field recordings; washing a live fish, walking in snow ~ anti-tropic - frozen shell of ice. Steps turn into jaw harp like pulses.

Sawing through softwood so fast it burns into cinders. Guitar on bungee, the culling is coming.

Pure Noise drag racing it's way through, the centre of the earth baby!

Response to sounds are different, but when lighter fuel guitar licks driveby shooting shit all over, a nice military beat, fuck that.

Multi-Split compilation DLCD, three tracks by each artist- Hands across the void, of the same ilk. Sledgehammer beats, in rough techno, industrial, hardbeat, D&B. This cut is rough.

WWW.HANDSPRODUCTIONS.COM

HANDS P.O. BOX 1701 90707 FURTH GERMANY

SHAUN ROBERT

HAIRY BUTTER

HAIRY BUTTER

LO RECORDINGS 2000

DURATION 44:29

From what I understand two females sit in front of a screen 24/7; watching telly, channel hopping, recording fragments, twisting them, lot of 2 step, uneven loops, kitchen sounds. Sampler crazy Hairy Butter is kinda of People like us w/ a drop of BOMB 20 - A friendly noise, lovely fucked textures, Meandering structure. Segments of Fontana Mix live in clubland garage ketamine mix.

Awful pointness shit, which makes it so interesting, it vaguely holds together, floating; fluttering over headlights. How

to explain it ?

Toy instruments / sirens / piano jumps / Digital Scaping ; Disco for deaf donkeys, w / o craig David.

Swell and Burst ? random select, lights go on and off, soft reverb saxophone, large pendulum clock. Bleed fuzz slight Heavy weight, latter half gets more rocking, twisted bigbeat hardstep.

Layered multi-loops reminiscent of since the accident severed heads.

Read in any order.

Need sense of humour.

What's next HAIRY SOAP ?

SHAUN ROBERT

HOLON

japanorexia-

Alice in Wonder (2000) Beiguim Duration 54:28

An indiscernible album. Starting like concept dance album. Shading in to back catalogue, B-side, cassette culture. This CD has no centre just a hole to fall into, massive asides, cascading production values; too deep in the mix.

What ate they looking for ? To ceiling do the bubble burst. Tables let smelt cream to introverted fountains. A late night vibe.

Leftfield chill out. Moving stasis. Crawling in the undergrowth. Dappled light inching cross hands and faces. Sound poetry. light distortion. Worked Sound Projection.

Misty daydreams funkeds outs beams tangible through the feet. Laden w/ images, brought to the mind sliding over each other. Shimmering pond life docusoap. Its abit weird but friendly, soft edged.

Metallic microscope shoal, light flashes on their movements. Drifting on sunny afternoon, waering antimatter shades. Burning away the face. CHANGE DIRECTION. Melted jazz, waiting for godot. Click, Slap, tickle, disjointed in the air; brushed by breeze, wind machine inside abandoned factory. ECHOES slow motion minimal brass.

Chris & Cosey w/out vocals, tape screams, lazy preset piano. An intimate outro.

DEATH TECHNO

Contact Holon ; Karel geertsstraat33-3 21 40 borgerhout - belguim.

web - koen@silverrec.com

SHAUN ROBERT



BERLINER THEORY

LIVE

STAALPLAAT (extended CDEP)
Holland DURATION 24:02

Made up of 3 "live" tracks. Starts with in "miles". sounding like Steve Reich tape loops, no phasing just graphic manipulation and field shifting. Next the longest excursion (1 2:40) called "Intro yy . a misty morning dew on the tracks, a pensive wait, gentle human, mechanical calls, stillness and movement, - a demolished station, now wasteland ... memories skate the night sky. Last track "brucewillis" (sic), a nuclear clock reverberating, ticking out of phase cross-eyed emotion, nausea, numb hooded, Crawling toward that tick, on all fours wooden floor. Metal elevator.

"Where's that fucking ticking coming from"?

Seem to find it, and it's gone like it was never there.

"Sam Aninger & Rupert + Huber, together Berliner Theorie, came to radio art and thus to art radio in their own way. Every concert, how small it is, is a manifestation of work done but sheds only partly light of what possibilities there are. This new CD can very well be by itself, but it can be your starting point for a discovery of a new world.

www.berliertheorie.de

SHAUN ROBERT

Original master

"hotflush"

Plush 04 (2001)

Duration 31:02

In the mix Ashley Slater & Steve Arguelles, do a bouncy techno twitch in abstract, but still sound v. commercial and trendy - old school holds the brace, obscene cool pumping, everybody thinks. The package is very arresting, like a white label, information is vague, very underground obscure, this element is cool, stomping. Break beat techno in drifted twisting, bass sub "music's on, idiot is on" TV Vs Music. Smelt visions in turntablism, listen; hear the blood pumping 'round midnight. Take a beat any fireball XLS. Terminate.

SHAUN ROBERT

(AV) 2000 remixes

"re: beat"

Plush 05 (2001)

Duration 34:50

Using the drum sounds of Steve Arguelles, beaten up & broken down from the sample CD, "Beat & Break shop" (available from specialist stores).

8 different artists starting w/ a squarepusher dopelganger; beautifully built sounds, organic but



bulletproof.

Cosmic clock, in dub tunnelling nowhere. Inside a toy piano cage, child in a headdress sits w/ the sun on his face. Voices "you're the beat generation YY?" "Yeah)v ; over & over, graphic manipulation, space shifting and funky manual beat pads. HOP beat w/ scene waving radio freaking. 23 skidoo kraftwerk 75 come to mind. It's on the up and get on down. Weather Report somehow free your mind and let your ass follow. Broken machines cry, they are ancient. Spacerock w/ a touch of hardcore newage. Mellow drill'n'bass. jazz drumming; relax into the beat, when will it stop?

Gamalan cymbal bell tones pitch makings yonder. A good intelligent electronica journey.

Roster : Tsuyoshi Nakamaru, Slater, Delbecq, Req.

SHAUN ROBERT

FON PROOF

WERZEUG NULL + NULL (2001) (GERMANY/Dutch ??)

DURATION

Does exacting what it says on the tin! and it says nothing on the cover.

(0+1)Sine tone moving, Sinuous meet, bending in and out; winding undulating. To come face to face with; to encounter meeting of hunters w/ sonic weapons. (0+2) BEEPS, SINGING MACHINE CODE, Humming integrated circuits. (0+3) SPACE INVADERS,

DEFENDER, FORBIDDEN PLANET; pumiceons conglomerate trace. (0+4) Laptop noise; Home computer music w/ sounds sources from w/ in the harddrive. Dr Who sounds effects in slow motion. Hand in glove. (0+5) Glitch static. Sparkler music in secret, long distance walking, imagines calling another time. (0+6) End sequence, Audio pops, sensual breathing; ohm sweet ohm and burn. Blurred into clarity. Embers chocolate and cake, fistula snake. (0+7) ALIEN ATTACK genocide to the human race. New Beginning. Peninsula is united to the mainland, a neck of land by which two continents are connected. (0+8) Dawn humm motion. Ritual washing, jump edit, backwards masking (0+9) ilibient (1 +9) COME ON THING OF NOTHING (2+9)

Helicopter landing over & over.

extreme noise tenderly done - confused

enough said

Masterpiece of noise

[HTTP://CONNECT.TO/WERKZEUG](http://connect.to/werkzeug)

SHAUN ROBERT



Benoit Delbecq / Steve Arguelles

"Piano Book"

Plush 06 (2001)

Duration 33:54

except line 6, a remix composed by Rod Packe. No real titles just line 1 /6. Raw piano sounds, disjointed as Glass/Satie but Cage/Stockhausen. Live piano w/ repeat peddle. A prepared pastoral nocturne trying to be Terry Riley - Duo - Arguelles on electronic assistance & obstacles.

How far do you travel while you are asleep ? Pierre Henry comes; old love child = not a cattle shed a penguin café orchestra. Some golden moments are worth waiting for, is this a grower or a numb skull "copying is made difficult by applicable laws"

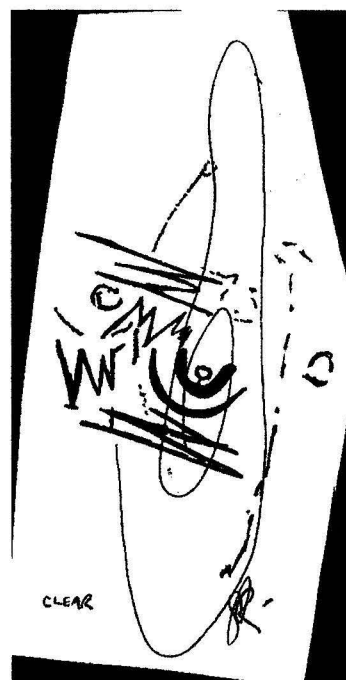
I will listen to this one again, there does seem to be skill at work.

A lost mile.

Later hot summers night July 2001. Mists grow over skating edges meditating. Disappearing, pulses. Strange behaviour, not melodic enough, not noisy enough. Richard Clyderman's fluffs joined together outside bleeds into recording.

www.plush-internet.org

SHAUN ROBERT



Shaun Robert

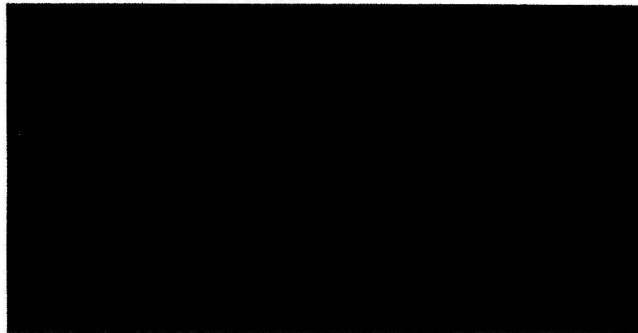
VENETIAN SNARES + SPEEDRANCH

MAKING ORANGE THINGS

planet Mu (2001) (UK)

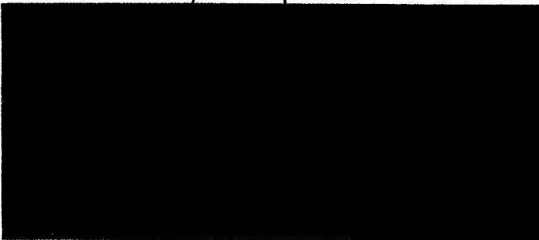
duration 41:24

RIOT BEAT FUCK TONE



SCREAM BEATS DISTORTED

VOCALS mostly v.stupid.



BREAK BEAT HAPPYHARDCORE FREAKOUT

There are some beatless ones. Serious then silly; floor the ceiling noise gates, overdriving graphic slides. Lyrics kinda 60's US psychedelic garage punk.

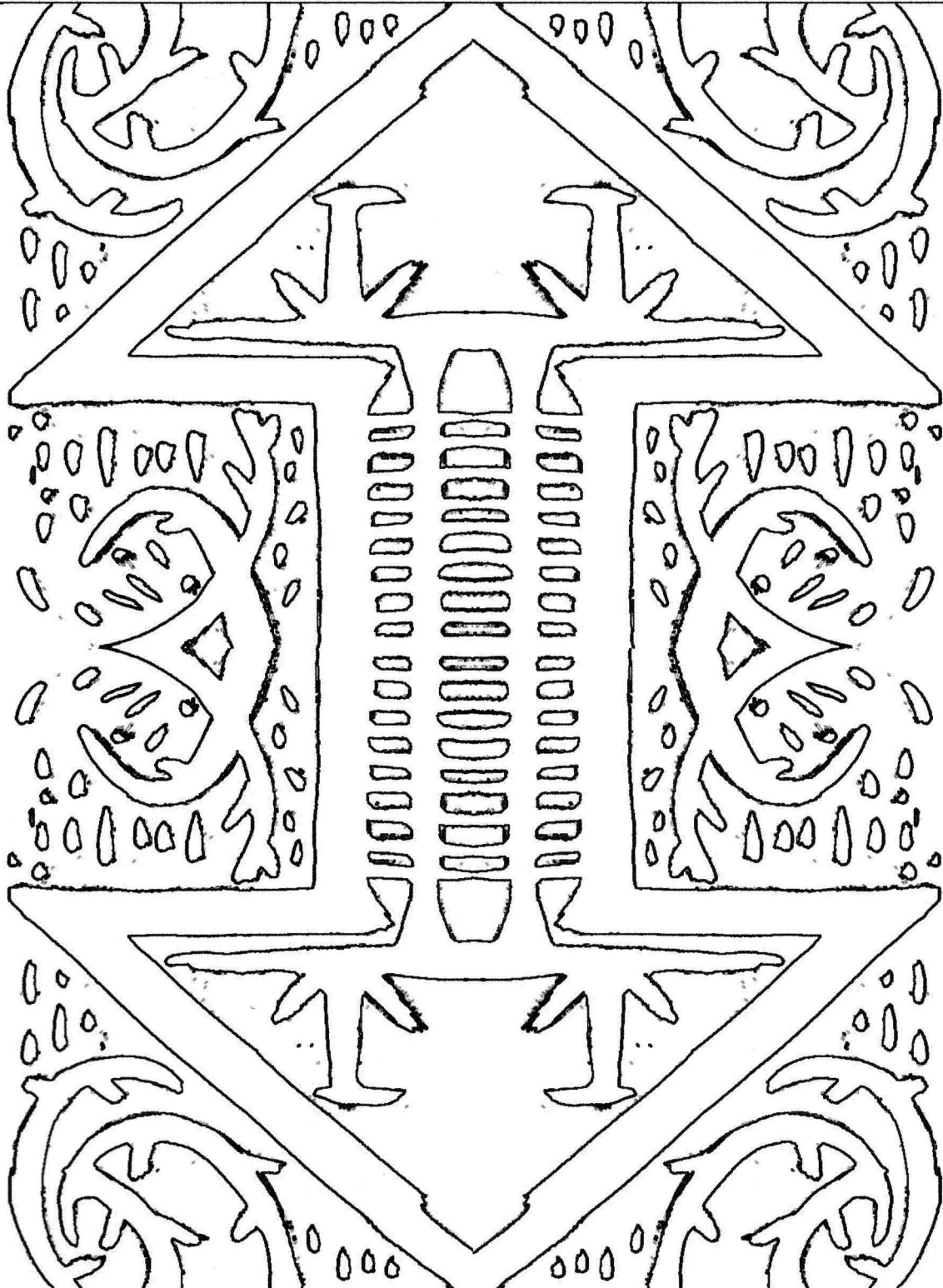
There is a SPEEDRANCH + V/VM connection.

Ends w/ Stairway to heaven.

PLANET MU LTD. PO BOX 276, WORCHESTER, WR5 2XJ.
MIKE@PLANET-MU.COM WWW.PLANET-MU.COM

Shaun Robert

ENVIRONMENT ♣ ♣ ♣ and DOCUMENTARY RECORDINGS ♣ ♣ ♣



Various Artists

Psychogeographical Dip USA GD STEREO GD013 CD (1997)

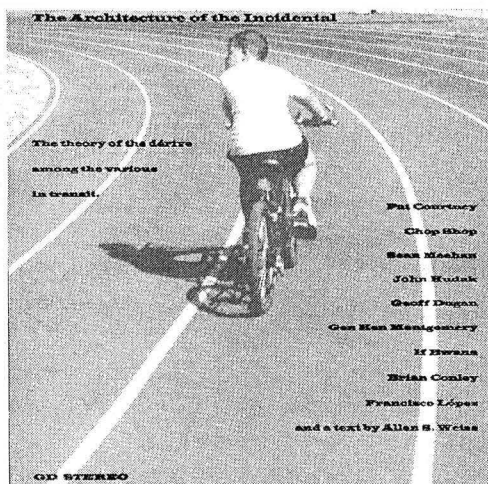
One of two great CDs compiled in NYC by Geoff Dugan. Both are supreme examples of environmental documentary recording I love so much, and they present little difficulty in being processed as glorious music. This record focusses on a particular site, an abandoned swimming pool in Brooklyn, McCarren Park Pool. A site once alive with people, but closed and derelict since 1986 after a fire. The sound documents produced by and within this apparent 'wasteland' reveal a wealth of interest.

We all know that places affect us, our memories, our emotions and our behaviour. The art of 'psychogeography' endeavours to make this nebulous perception into more of a precise science. I suppose it's to do with a process of investigation and discovery - and concentration. Any finding that is revealed through your researches counts as psychogeography, as does any action you perform within the bounds of your search. Crumbs. This makes it seem even more nebulous, doesn't it? Well, listen to some concrete results - they're here on this record.

The nine artists here have adopted the art of the 'dérive' from the French intellectuals who (under the tutelage of Guy Debord) formed the Situationist International in Paris in the 1950s. Their concept of the 'situation', according to Tony Rayns, 'referred to the group's own wish to redefine urban environments as playgrounds in time and space for the liberated psychogeographer.' Geoff Dugan and his cohorts are building a 'sonic map' of this abandoned pool and its surroundings, a concept reinforced by the blueprint insert which is packed with portable nuggets of info: images, quotes, diagrams, statements, oblique comments.

These images assist the recordings in offering 'snapshots' of the psychic life of the site. Geoff Dugan's 'Mirage' is almost straight documentary, with traffic and airplanes along with birdsong and barking dogs; it's filled with fugitive images, including his own shadow, as he walks over the site. Gen Ken Montgomery records a little girl singing about washing her hair, alongside the sounds of running water - until her voice becomes swamped within a vast echoing sound. Other tracks contain memories of the former life of this public space; John Hudak's recording suggests the ghosts of swimmers, bodies immersed in slow-moving water. Chop Shop's 'Dry Hole' track likewise laments the passing of the pool, and immerses the listener deep inside a memory of water. Sean Meehan's 'Neglect' widens the scope to include a vision of urban decay, with his metallic music suggesting a ghost of industry since passed from the site.

More speculative, mystical visions are provided by Brian Conley, whose



'Empty' is a portrait of the space of the pool all around us, its vast echoing sounds soon building into a grand speculation on abandonment and isolation. Francisco López goes even further, with his worrisome granular silences overdubbed into a thunderous roar. I have no idea how these recordings were made, yet they succeed in capturing intangibles - an atmosphere, a memory, but always the very strong sense of a specific location. The CD closes on a more hopeful note, with a documentary recording of Astoria Park Pool by Pat Courtney. Presumably this swimming pool is still open, judging by the happy squeals of the public swimming and splashing! So we move from a vision of a near-desolate wasteland filled with ghosts, to the friendly community 'paradise' of the Astoria.

Even if you don't dig the art of psychogeography, this quiet record is still utterly fascinating to listen to, and I recommend it highly.

ED PINSENT

PO Box 1546, New York, NY 10276, USA

Various Artists

The Architecture of the Incidental USA GD STEREO GD014 CD (1999)

The second Geoff Dugan project is equally fascinating, and follows the same brief. Subtitled 'The Theory of the Dérive among the various in transit', it has something of a travelling theme. Dugan confirms it with 'Interstitial', his documentary tapes of subway trains. He isn't interested in continuous noises, and the trains appear directionless as they stop and start, brake, and start again; we can't hear passengers on the tape, so there is no purpose to the doors opening and closing. Brian Conley likewise appears interested in trains, as his long and chaotic track starts off with a clunky carriage-ride that audibly shakes the listener into jelly. The noises are overdubbed with steely, sparking noises that suggest other trains rushing headlong into each other. He then ring-modulates the whole mess, adds huge dollops of echo and overdubs, until it becomes an insane twittering nightmare.

This powerful disorientation effect is the first step in Dugan's strategy to open up the vistas that psychogeography will allow. The recordings on this disc 'represent an array of islets, constant currents, or vortexes'. Dugan and his cohorts are interested in zones that provide a potential state of flux, places that might open up other dimensions. Both of Pat Courtney's tracks suggest a busy hotel lobby, filled with constant human activity and shuffling along corridors; there is distant talking, but nothing is identifiable. The sense of anticipation is palpable. His 'Labyrinth' opens the CD and 'Liberation' closes it, as we enter the mysterious zones through this threshold, then check out again like hotel guests.

In between are several strange episodes in sound, which are all wonderful to listen to and may have potentially transforming effects on the listener. They all have that infinite quality, appearing neither to start nor end. 'Diffusion' by Chop Shop is an intense roaring and grinding, tapes of differing lengths and textures edited together to suggest unseen workers in the sewers below. Gen Ken Montgomery fetches back a warped image of the populace in his highly complex assemblage 'Public Hearing', voices building to a cacophony against a noise of whistles, streets, and traffic. Other tracks are far more extreme, unchanging, and relentlessly abstract, such as Sean Meehan's contemplation of the picture of a loved one which is simply a set of high oscillating tones and rich spinning harmonics; the sound trebles in intensity to an unbearable range. Equally painful on the ears is the interminable chattering of electronic monkeys captured by John Hudak in 'Asphalt', while the artificial birds crafted by If Bwana on 'Evening' are somewhat more palatable. Francisco López delivers his usual low, cavernous silence, a chilling icy tone.



The Sound 9projector Ninth Issue 2001

All of these recordings are insistently urban, in line with the Situationist theory which was an intellectual, semi-mystical 'answer' to the problems of alienation within modern large cities. The musical essays on this record are equally intellectual, but they also deal in the power of the imagination. All of them ask questions about the nature of everything they find within a modern urban environment, and constantly challenge the purpose of these things. In this way, new options can be proposed, and as Dugan suggest, 'a milieu of possible trajectories' are opened up and left for exploration. While the *Psychic Dip* CD was specific to a certain site, this CD can be used successfully by any modern city-dweller. It will show how the world can be changed by imagination; we'll map our own meanings into the closed-off streets of the city.

ED PINSENT

PO Box 1546, New York, NY 10276, USA

Bexar Bexar

07.04.99

USA ELEVATOR BATH EEAOA06 ONE SIDED 12" SINGLE (2000)

Pleasant. Over an 'environmental' tape collage of a firework display, the chortlings of a jolly crowd and bleating car alarms, a soft pastoral acoustic guitar riff meanders gently. Listen long enough, and the 'accidents' in the tape-collage start to perform in synch with the music, complementing and accompanying it in unexpected ways. A fine one-sided item from Texas, USA; Bexar Bexar is an unknown solo project, occasionally given to collaborating.

ED PINSENT

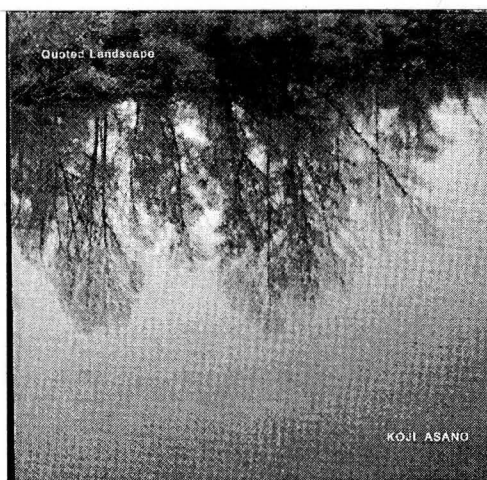
Koji Asano

Quoted Landscape

SPAIN SOLSTICE 20 CD (2001)

This 72 minute piece was recorded live in Barcelona, using little more than a microphone, out in the open air, on a windy day. But what an epic! It contains and embodies air, vision, light and space. It's more than just the air - there is also an amplifier humming ominously, perhaps a studio recording, mixed in - and an effective use of dropouts, to reveal pure silence. The wind buffeting the mic creates a percussion effect. Might be interesting to compare this to Hazard's use of Chris Watson's wind recordings; Asano is far more abrasive, and leaves all the rough edges in. Just leave the record on, and enjoy it.

Asano's most extreme piece yet, this is very challenging to sit through in one sitting, but it has a kind of inner serenity that eventually transfers to the listener. Bring your own memories and experiences of walks in the country, and this helps complete the picture considerably. *Quoted Landscape* is, I think, quite some way from a Virginia Astley-styled landscape portrait; her records are beautiful, but simply ask us to accept the beauty of a warm summer's day in a garden, which isn't



a particularly challenging stance. Asano suggests the wild nature of a landscape, perhaps an entire planet, filled with meteorological forces we don't yet understand, and which remain untamed by progress. He reacquaints us with unknown elements, and allows us to reconnect to the lost mysteries of the earth.

ED PINSENT

More Koji Asano in Music From Japan

Tagamanent, 5 Atico, 08012 Barcelona, Spain
solstice@kojiasano.com
www.kojiasano.com

Peter Cusack and Max Eastley

Day for Night

UNITED KINGDOM PARADIGM PD 14 CD (2000)

Not exclusively formed of environmental and wildlife recordings - there's a lot of stringed instrument playing - but *Day For Night* does make highly effective use of many such recordings in a brilliant tape-collage suite. The sleeve is covered with landscapes, both photographs and watercolours, and along with the silhouette of a cricket and the stained glass river-of-music on the front cover, goes together to evoke a fascinating journey through the wondrous English landscape. The first track 'Peep Show' mixes a firework display, a marching band, insects buzzing and snatches and samples of music and sound. 'Zero Day to Zero night' has a bonfire, birdsong and a wild dog (!) making an uncanny barking noise; this piece is more in Chris Watson territory, only somehow not as mystical.

Peter Cusack is a veteran improviser on stringed instruments, including the guitar and bouzouki, both of which he plays here. He has recently been involved in some large-scale sound-gathering / walking projects in and around London, and has exhibited the results. Max Eastley has exhibited sculptures of his kinetic, sound-making metal objects. His interest in this area is reflected in some of the choices of materialist objects used as sound sources (eg aeolian harps, broken glass, humming tops), an interest audible on the title track, and on 'Cast', a documentary tape from the factory floor with added layers

of droning music. Most sublimely, on the short track 'Arc Light', which presumably features the electroacoustic monochord - without doubt a device of Eastley manufacture.

The tracks 'Shade 1' and 'Shade 2' near the end are the most haunting; I'd like to think they're nocturnal recordings, but I'm probably mistaken. They both suggest stations on a surreal train-journey worthy of De Chirico, the second one featuring the return of fire - an element that seems to be one key theme to this record.

The art lies in the selection and the editing, as much as in the playing and the recordings; if I was given the same raw material, chances are I would simply emerge with a hideous mess of noise and abysmal tape-edits. Here, these two gifted UK sound-artists triumph with a totally coherent series of statements, all their thoughts lined up in a row. They have also created some intensely beautiful things to listen to.

ED PINSENT

paradigm@stalk.net

Hazard

Wind

UNITED KINGDOM ASH
INTERNATIONAL ASH 6.5 CD (2001)

An interesting joint project, credited to Benny Nilsen of Stockholm. Nilsen had been recording in the open air for several months, and after he'd mistaken for a scarecrow for the 15th time Mike Harding finally put him in touch with the UK's finest nature documentarian and wildlife recorder, Chris Watson. The eight tracks of *Wind* started with recordings of the wind, originally made by Watson then highly reprocessed and reworked by Hazard. Watson provides his commentary in terms of when and where he captured these sounds, and the equipment he used. He is, as ever, rigorously precise about geographic locations, times of day, and the direction he was facing at the time. He is attuned to the environment, local place names, local wildlife, and can describe weather conditions with an elegant simplicity. Nilsen is likewise clued up about technical weather terms, alternating these with 'quoted' weather reports in his notes.

The music might seem quiet in places, but the quietness conceals an inner strength of pure iron. Groove for groove, the surface is more electronic than field recording, and if you'd come in 'blind' you might mistake it for ordinary Ambient. But the deep power of nature shines through on every track. Especially on the haunting 'Village' track, which includes an 'energetic storm', and the increasingly brooding drama of 'Anemo'. I could 'air' my single reservation and ask, must every sound in nature end up only to be used as a sample inside a laptop? Is nothing safe from this international project to capture all sound? But this fear is probably groundless in this instance, as all the artists concerned with this release (including the people behind this label) are concerned to communicate the *truth* about nature, through art and through science, through sound and through image, through fact and

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fiction. There are even some 'recommended wind websites' you can access via the Touch website. Maybe the wind is another thing we shouldn't take for granted, especially as increased global despoliation looks set to further disrupt normal weather patterns.

ED PINSENT

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Ellen Band 90% Post Consumer Song

USA XI RECORDS XI 124 CD (2000)

Here's a superb batch of modern compositions realised from field recordings; Ellen Band works with her carefully selected and perfectly recorded slices-of-life from the environment, and rethinks and remodels them into musical compositions. It's all about putting familiar sounds into a new context. She does this by careful listening, selecting frequencies or passages that she can work with or remake. She hopes to reflect on the true integral nature of sounds, their imagistic properties and the memories of the real world that sounds embody. And there's a mystical dimension too, something she calls the 'psychoacoustic' properties of sound.

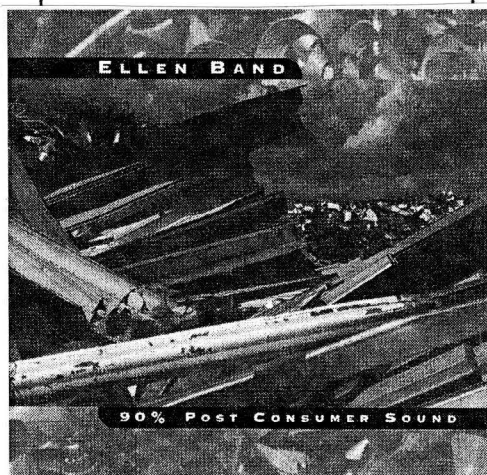
Her two most effective pieces for this listener occur at the start of this compilation. There's 'Railroad Gamelan' from 1992, a superb layered sound collage using the sounds of passing freight trains - bells, clanking and the occasional whistle are overdubbed, to remake the sound of the train into a Gamelan percussion ensemble. This sounds great, it's exciting and keeps the listener in a perpetual state of anticipation - will that train ever go by? 'Swinging Sings' starts with the sound of playground swings, whose squeaks and creaks become a percussion track for added live violins (played by Band, and Adele Armin) - whose frequencies match and enhance those of the squeaking chains. This is a very natural-seeming composition, a very open structure which works brilliantly.

'Radiatore' works with much smaller sounds, those generated by a malfunctioning water heater as it slowly comes to life. If you were expecting David Lynch's Radiator Lady to appear dramatically out of the steam, forget it; this has tension, but it's a lot less menacing than the black drama of Bruce Gilbert's radiator recording from last year, issued on the Raft label. But machinery failing to work properly is always compelling. If you skipped to ten minutes after the start, you'd be baffled by these strange bubbling sounds.

While 'Closet Bird' sounds a bit clichéd nowadays, I'm prepared to stand up for it because I love the sound of birdsong so much. As birdsong recordings go, the 'edge' it has over the competition is the glorious background hum. Finally, there's 'Minimally Tough', an intriguing and quiet work full of gentle ruffling and creaking noises. What's going on? An origami convention in a leather tannery?

'Events like the passing of a train or the ON

cycle of a radiator are augmented in ways that imprint them on the brain forever', notes Brenda Hutchinson, commenting on the gradual 'unfolding' structure that Ellen Band favours for each piece. True: not only does she create music out of them, but there's a fascination in the way a brief event is extended and stretched, like a loop in a time machine. The overdubs and treatments always reach a crescendo of activity in the



middle, then drop away again allowing you to hear the untreated sounds from a new perspective. Deeply fascinating. A great record from this Toronto born composer active since the mid 1970s, who situates herself in the American Minimalist milieu and has exhibited her work in the contexts of performance, sculpture, tape-alone and installation.

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Various Artists

An Uncommon Nature

USA ANOMALOUS RECORDS NOM 6
VINYL LP (2001)

If Musique Concrète is the 'cooked', then here is the 'raw'. These nine cuts of virtually unprocessed acoustic music and field recordings offer a refreshing burst of non-electric sounds in a world filled with over-processed laptop music. Compiled by Eric Lanzillotta, the LP features new work by artists already established on the Anomalous roster (and some new musicians who will soon be signing up). It arrives in a gorgeous black and white sleeve with nature photos and postcard inserts by Rachael Jackson, and a haiku by Philip Corner printed on the spine. This little poem - *in the midst of distractions / turning suddenly to listen / towards the water* - encapsulates neatly the totality of the LP's statement.

Water is a recurring image, from the babbling brook on Monos' track to the ocean waves backing up the violin playing of Mike Shannon, and the rainfall recorded by Dave Knott in the Maryland countryside. Other field recordings include Mirror's strange snapshot which could come from a

shop interior (incidentally the only urban interlude in this pastoral suite) with chimes, a squeegee against a window pane, and traffic murmuring outside. The remaining tracks feature a species of musical activity, albeit a very minimal form of 'playing'. Jonathan Coleclough continues his preoccupation with 'playing' non-musical inanimates, here scraping and sawing against a wrought-iron gate. He sounds like a full orchestra taking on Ligeti's works for the first time. Richard Lerman is a noted US composer who rattles and scrapes a few house-bricks around with an added field recording of bleating sheep. Agog plays his own 'instruments' which are more like crude sculptures, here sounding like he's stirred up a literal hornet's nest - providing the most abrasive track on an otherwise very soothing LP. With Jeph Jerman, we have perhaps the perfect synthesis of nature and art; his very low-key musical activity amounts to little more than rattling stones and wood, yet his work is utterly compelling. He has the first track and might be said to embody the purest form of what *An Uncommon Nature* is about.

I've enjoyed this record and like the way it's structured with the relaxing 'Nocturne' of the Dave Knott track at the end. There are a few sounds which have been heard perhaps once too often - including traffic sounds, sheep, birdsong, thunder - but then, it's the context that makes it different and worthwhile. My only other reservation is that none of the pieces really develops very much, with the exception of Mirror's track which gathers darkness over its second half, and 'The Card Game' by Climax Golden Twins, whose inert grey rattling is gradually replaced by a shellac-record quietly rotating. This LP is a fully coherent statement in music, art and titling, and it's the perfect introduction to Anomalous, and the welcome difference this label is trying to make. It obliges us to notice nature more, inviting us to lose ourselves within the universe we can find inside a single drop of water. From this point, we might take a leaf from the musicians' book and develop more sympathy for our environment. This can only be a good thing for everyone.

ED PINSENT

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Justin Bennett

The Mosques of Tanger

THE NETHERLANDS STAALPLAAT
STMCD 009 3 x CD (2000)

Not sure if this recording of muezzins in the Moroccan city of Tanger calling the Muslim faithful to early morning prayers is one single recording or actually a series of overlapping recordings - the CD sleeve does not say. Anyway, the concert of muezzins' sonorous voices seemingly taking turns to relay the call to prayer throughout the city is the most remarkable aspect of this recording. Background noises have also been captured onto this CD: the croaking of night insects, the calls of crows and the sound of a jeep roaring through what might be a narrow street in the city's old quarter with its souks

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selling Oriental trinkets and other exotica (assuming Tanger has an old quarter that has not yet succumbed to the bulldozer, the concrete super-highway and the 16-storey shopping malls), help to create an ambience and reinforce the idea that this is a single recording.

Leaving aside the issue of commercial exploitation (I don't think the muezzins would be all that pleased that some foreigner is benefiting monetarily from their daily aubade), I am disappointed that Staalplaat has not included some information about the recording(s) and the muezzins themselves; whether they are able to co-ordinate their cries so they don't clash and confuse the devout, even though these men may be located so far apart they cannot even see their fellow muezzins' minarets. (Of course, they could be using loudspeakers and tape machines.) This lack of information only reinforces the notion that this CD is just another piece of exotica for bored consumers of World Music looking for another culture to plunder. Most of us in the West have pretty jaundiced views about Islam (eg look at how they treat their women! look at their barbaric amputation laws! they blew up some Buddhist statues! [Statues that no-one else cared about until the Taliban in Afghanistan finally gave them a more permanent home - oblivion.]) and Staalplaat missed a chance to enlighten us about a particular aspect of the religion. Shame!

At the very least, some of the more mechanically minded among you readers may be able to hook this CD to your alarm clocks somehow so that every morning you will be able to savour the sounds of an early dawn in a distant Maghrebian city instead of the usual tinny alarm clock or radio messages as you rise and shine for yet another grey day at the office or assembly line in the armaments factory. Ah yes, I can see you've got a busy day ahead - another Middle Eastern government has placed an order for rocket launchers ... well, better stop waffling and let you all go to work.

JENNIFER HOR

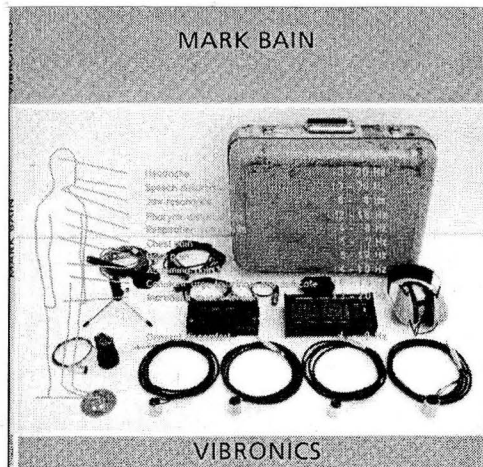
*Staalplaat, PO Box 11453, 1001 GL,
Amsterdam, The Netherlands*

Mark Bain

Vibronics

THE NETHERLANDS STAALPLAAT
STMCD019 3" CD (2001)

Ahh, the secret life of buildings - who among us can say they haven't been in some way deeply touched by all the places where they've lived, or rented a room? And I'm not talking haunted houses, kiddo. Seems these days there are quite a few modern sound-artists who are fascinated by the sonic possibilities redolent within architecture and the infrastructures of modern urban-scapes, and making some pretty good recordings from their explorations too. A few which spring to mind are Disinformation, Brandon La Belle, Steve Roden, and Achim Wollschied - the latter proving particularly successful (and intensely irritating!) in his



attempts to record a house 'playing' itself. Mark Bain is another name in the field, who does his level best to turn buildings (and specific local environments) into sounding objects. He mostly does it using his hyper-sensitive, low-frequency microphones, equipment normally used by geologists for detecting seismic shifts in the earth; these mics can detect the tiniest movement within a supposedly 'inert' structure. If the object needs a little nudge, he might deploy his mechanical oscillators and electronic controllers. On this short record, he showcases his interesting discoveries with a wooden bridge, a big metal box in Utrecht which was filled with an audience of passengers, and various sites within a working laboratory. The latter one is a particular success, as the diversely-located sources get 'mixed' together into one homogenous noise.

Bain knows buildings - aware of the materials used in their manufacture, sensitive to locations, environments, inhabitants, atmospheric conditions, the weather - and urges his students to treat them as living creatures, not as mere empty shells to shield us from the elements. If they are living creatures, this record finds a voice for them. Surely you know how buildings move; when I tidied up my Dad's library in 1983 (thus creating order from a chaotic room), my Mum remarked how 'every so often, the house has to groan, stretch and settle back down in a new position.' These minute shifts in the plaster and creaking movements in the floor can be translated into sonic events.

All that said, Bain's record is not a particularly exciting listen. I do care for it a lot myself, in particular the soothing drone of the wooden bridge and the uneventful complexity of 'Laboratorium', which is a real deep penetration recording. But somehow *Vibronics* doesn't convey a lot, or create enough of an atmosphere, nor communicate any of the semi-mystical resonances he is clearly hoping for (judging by his keen-to-explain, rather pretentious, sleeve note). Maybe he's a tad too much of a technician, and not enough of an artist.

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Aeron Bergman

The Shed Record

UNITED KINGDOM DISKONO 010 CD
(2001)

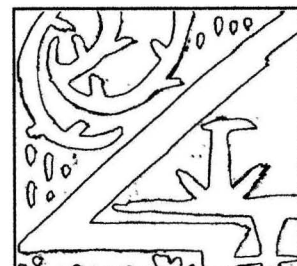
An excellent angle on field-recording composition from this American Lucky Kitchen fellow, some of whose other recent records are reviewed elsewhere. The starting point here is home recordings, made in and around the garden at his grandmother's house - a delightful domestic setting comes over (it always appears to be a sunny day) but it is soon transformed. Right from the start, Bergman inserts his electronic interpolations and radically varies the documentary recordings. The foreign sounds co-exist with the natural sounds, often in the same moment. The effect is of an electronic 'daydream' invading reality, the protagonist dreamer shifting between his garden and the somnambulist state and back again, all within seconds. Real Alice In Wonderland-time. This distorts and disturbs one's sense of reality in a powerful way.

It isn't, however, a nightmarish episode - it's rather pleasant. Little cartoon diagrams on the sleeve indicate the playfulness of the work, and the elements used are friendly and familiar: there's birdsong, voices of friends, family and neighbours, playing the piano, dogs barking. The record ends with a friendly young couple giggling and kissing. There's local domestic activities like hammering, opening and closing windows, digging the garden, playing table tennis. Passing visitors are indicated by loud car stereos and aeroplanes overhead. Bergman can take moments from all of these and instantly process them into concrete sounds, mostly in a gentle way, making the fabric of reality warp and shift into a strange new music. He's capable of louder and more violent work too, generating earth-shattering loud tones out of nothing, summoning up huge sheets of crashing electronic thunder which suddenly drop away, leaving us back in the peaceful garden again. A looping music is made from a single phrase of a girl singing at the piano. A woman singing 'Getting To Know You' is fractured into a series of repeats, so that she appears to take the same pause for breath five times over.

'I think we've got a groundhog problem,' remarks a voice to a neighbour, distressed at the holes appearing in the lawn. The record itself might have a *Groundhog Day* problem, what with the playful way it makes us relive moments over again, opening dramatic shifts in the temporal unity of a quiet summer's day.

ED PINSENT

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Interview by
JENNIFER HOR

YOU'LL HAVE NOTICED in the last few issues of *TSP* that editor Ed Pinsent has been reviewing and (mostly) praising a number of solo and collaborative recordings by Sydney-based experimental/improv musician Oren Ambarchi. One such CD which has mightily impressed Ed and many others is *The Alter Rebbe's Nigun*, which Ambarchi recorded with long-

time associate Robbie Avenaim and which was released by John Zorn in 1999 on his label Tzadik under the Radical Jewish Culture series. This CD seems to represent a watershed for Ambarchi; parts of it recall the hardcore/punk mayhem of his mid-90s band Phlegm which included Avenaim and manic Muppet-voiced Nick Kamvissis, while other parts of the CD look forward to Ambarchi's recent explorative works like the *Stacte* vinyl series and collaborative works like the recent *Reconnaissance* with turntablist DJ Martin Ng.

Ambarchi and Avenaim also direct the annual experimental music festival Whatismusic? which has showcased live local and international acts to Australian audiences since the mid-90s. In 2000 the festival included, among others, Keith Rowe of AMM, Peter Rehberg, Christian Fennesz, Skot and Mike Morley of The Dead C; this year's festival will feature Florian Hecker and Farmers Manual in the star-studded line-up. On top of all this and his various solo/collaborative projects, Ambarchi finds time to work at Red Eye Records and (in the last year) teach music improvisation at a university in far western Sydney. Talk about a work ethic!

The interview below took place at Ambarchi's home on the afternoon of February 7th, 2001. I'd been warned by a friend of his that he keeps a bevy of beauteous blonde babes in his place; if so, Ambarchi had them all stashed behind the walls and under the floor when I arrived. Throughout the interview though, I heard incessant thumping behind the walls (it's all on the tape) which threatened to topple Ambarchi's vast CD and record collection. To put it modestly, Ambarchi's music collection is a cornucopia where Ethiopian '70s pop and Brazilian artists Caetano Veloso and Gilberto Gil jostle for space with free jazz, Norwegian black metal, Hermann Nitsch, Whitehouse and Frank Sinatra. After putting on Francisco López's insect music CD to mask the girls' noisy thumping, Ambarchi kindly and patiently answered my mostly inane questions. (Ed's probably going to have to send a free *TSP9* to Mr López for his accidental assistance in the interview.)

● OREN GIVES A
HISTORY LESSON

JH What is your background in music, especially in improv and experimental music?

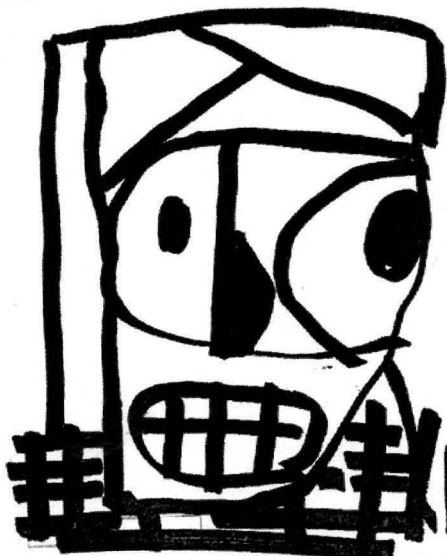
OA I guess I grew up with music; ever since I was really small, I was obsessed with music and I used to listen to the Beatles and Hendrix and absolutely adored them and stuff like that. I used to have a record player with all these 7" records that my mum would get me – we used to go into a shopping mall and I would hear a song and keep singing it so eventually she would buy it for me. I would wear the record out so she bought me another copy. My aunt once said to me that if she ever had to hear Led Zeppelin's 'Whole Lotta Love' again, she would have murdered me because I played it all the time! I was always interested in music, it was always [playing] in the house. My grandfather used to play Arab music all day and all night so that somehow stuck in my head.

Percussion really interested me – I begged my father to get me a drum kit and after forcing me to play the piano, hoping I'd forget about the drums, he eventually bought me a drum kit when I was 10 years old. I was playing rock

AFTERNOON TEA WITH OREN AMBARCHI

FEMBOT

R/p



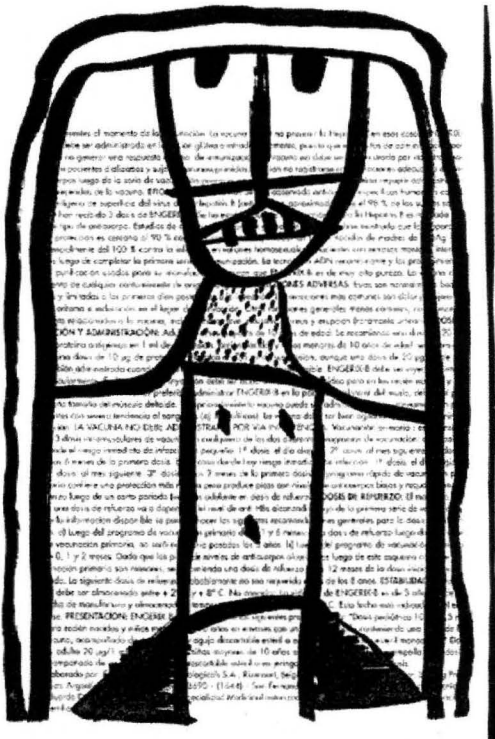
music until, via Mitch Mitchell and Jimi Hendrix, I got into John Coltrane when I was 13 or 14 and became absolutely obsessed with jazz. That led me to free jazz: Cecil Taylor, Albert Ayler, all those people. I was 19 when I formed my first proper group playing drums – a free jazz group involving a lot of older free jazz people in Sydney. The free jazz led to improv and later I switched to guitar. I still play the drums but I think [at the time] there was a lack of guitar players [in Sydney] who thought the same way I did. They were either jazz players or rock players [not improv players].

JH You mean they played very structured music?

OA Yeah. It was very frustrating trying to find a [guitarist] to play with so I eventually ended up [playing guitar] myself. I'd been to New York a few times in the early 1990s and I saw Haino Keiji and a lot of different guitarists and I was really inspired. I thought, this is what I want to do.

JH So you actually came to guitar quite late?

OA Really late – not in my teens but in my twenties. I really started playing guitar in 1993. Weird.



JH You never had any formal tuition on guitar?

OA No. Records. Sometimes it's interesting to approach an instrument without having any preconceived ideas or being stuck in tradition. My friend Nick Kamvisis [Oren's partner in MS] plays the bass or guitar – he plays more guitar now – just literally using one string or two strings at most and what he does is so beautiful, so fresh and free. It's inspiring, left-of-centre. I don't see the point of doing something that everyone else is doing. Why? There are already so many people doing the same thing so well – or boringly.

JH Let's hear about your first band.

OA My first band was Ear Rational Music, a free jazz group with sax player Eddie Bronsin. He came to Australia from Russia in the early 70's and was in a group called Free Kata which released two records. [This was] the first Australian free jazz group in '71 or '72. I think Bronsin has played with Jon Rose. There was a weird Jewish connection: I was studying in a rabbinical college many, many years ago and Bronsin was also Jewish and he used to come in. I'd seen him do gigs so I approached him about his playing and he just couldn't believe this religious Jew saying 'Oh man, I've seen you playing,' and he went, 'What?!' We hooked up and started doing sax-drums duets and Ear Rational Music formed.

JH How did your friend Robbie Avenaim get involved?

OA Robbie was in the group as well; there were two drummers. I also had a crude electronics set-up, really old-school crude and cheap.

JH Did you meet Robbie at college?

OA No, that was a school thing. He was a year below me in high school. We played a lot of music together in our teens and eventually we played drums together, playing along to records.

JH How did Nick Kamvisis get involved?

OA After Ear Rational Music, I was in another group that played a lot of Ornette Coleman material. At the time, a lot of us rediscovered rock music or [rather] extreme rock music, noise, stuff like that, so within the group there was this weird tension where some of us were more jazz and some of us were more extreme. Out of the frustration of that [situation], we formed a punk-improv group just as I was changing to guitar. I met Nick because he came to a lot of gigs I was doing with different groups and we hit it off. He was the only person in 1991 to mention Haino Keiji to me and I'd just seen Haino in New York and I couldn't believe that this guy from Merrylands in

the suburbs had all these Haino records in 1991 as no-one knew who Haino was, especially in Australia. I said to Nick, 'Come over to my place', and he came over. He had absolutely no training in music, no instruments, but he left me a tape, saying, 'This is just a tape I did at home', so I played it after he left and it totally blew me away. So that's how we started a trio. Originally it was me on guitar, Robbie on drums and Nick just on vocals but eventually Nick was handed a bass and he started [playing] it in the most incredible way and that's how Phlegm started. That was early 1993.

JH Could you explain the performance aspect of Phlegm?

OA It's a long time ago now. We were pretty young and crazy and Nick's a real performer as well, he really throws himself into the situation, literally. At the time, the gigs were a lot of fun and we were doing them in a context that was usually unfriendly and unreceptive because we were in the rock world so that made us a bit more aggressive with a bit more 'fuck you' attitude towards everything. In those days, we didn't really care about the consequences, we just went nuts. We had a lot of unfavourable [reactions] – people would jump up on stage and grab us saying, 'What are you doing? Why?!' and we had some run-ins with audience members [and definitely run-ins with] club owners [and] sound people. But a lot of people really loved what we did. It was a really healthy period in Sydney in '93 – '94, we were playing 2 or 3 times a week which was just amazing. What we were doing was absolutely uncompromising so we really learnt a lot.

JH Were there more venues then?

OA Yeah, the live scene was really active, there were a lot of interesting groups. Things have really changed now. I guess what I'm doing now is a reflection of how things have changed. There aren't so many live venues now and a lot of people are just doing stuff at home, doing a lot of recording at home. That's how *Insulation* happened because everything stopped so I rethought what I was doing and started experimenting on my own for once.

JH That's been a worldwide trend, people doing more and more things now on their own at home. I suppose all over the world venues are drying up or people have fewer opportunities to go out and there are forms of entertainment like the Internet and email vying for people's attention.

OA For sure. And it's cheaper to do stuff at home now. Whereas it's an ordeal to go to the studios and pay so much money, though I still [record] that way.

JH You took Phlegm to Japan and the United States?

OA We took it to Japan twice. The US was a bit different because the first time [Phlegm] was myself and Robbie, we did some stuff with Zorn and we had Kato Hideki playing bass with us. The second time we just went to Japan and we did MS in America.

JH How did you meet John Zorn and end up playing at his birthday party?

OA I'd seen Zorn a few times in New York in the early 90's. Someone introduced us and we hit it off. He gave me his number and said, 'Whenever you decide to come back, give me a call.' I'd heard about his birthday celebration and at the time I was a big fan and was considering going there so I faxed him and asked, 'Is it happening?' and he said, 'Yeah, do you want to play?' and that's how it happened.

JH It was just you and Robbie there?

OA Yeah. We ended up doing a gig with Kato Hideki and some improv stuff with Zorn and then I did Cobra. It was a really good experience. I did Cobra with an ensemble of about 18 people from all over the world with Zorn conducting. It was interesting, it was scary because I'd only really started playing guitar 6 months before that. It was pretty nerve-wracking but being in situations like that, you really learn a lot.

JH What's happening with MS? Last time I saw Nick, he was talking about going to technical college to do a visual arts course.

OA He just got in. He's really happy... It's not like MS is the most demanding band. It's just fun, we only get together if someone wants us to do an album so we do it. It there's a gig, we get together and that's it. It's really casual, just a lot of fun.

JH Is Phlegm still continuing?

OA No, Phlegm fizzled out and all three of us – well, people just

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change and think differently, that's what happening... I just think we're all just doing different things, we have different interests now.

JH How did you get the contract with Dr Jim's Records? [This label released Phlegm's first album, Dr Hooah visits the Non-stop Pissing Circus.]

OA He'd seen us [play] live and heard a demo and just wanted us to do an album. The other two albums I put out.

JH Where did you get the pictures for the third album, Popping and Milking?

OA The pictures were from a pregnant woman porno mag [which] was actually called *Popping and Milking*.

JH Who would you say has been your main influence over the years? Or have you had influences from everywhere?

OA Yeah, it's impossible to pin it down 'cos everything influences you and I'm really into a lot of different things so I really don't want to pick anything specific.

JH During your teens, you were more involved in free jazz.

OA Yes, I was heavily in that, definitely. But before that, I was really involved with rock and pop music so that's always embedded in the back of my head. And it's always around.

JH Do you still listen to a lot of classical Arab music and Arab pop?

OA Yeah, definitely. I love Umm Kalthoum [aka Oum Kalsoum – famous female Egyptian singing star] and the guy who wrote her music and arranged it. It's easy [to find Arab music] if you go to the Arab areas [in Sydney], they sell cheap cassettes like you could buy in Egypt.

JH Looking back on your past, is there anything in particular that sticks out in your career? Any major decision or thing you've done that's changed your life?

OA My career's young still. Choosing to play guitar changed my life, that was a big move. I think a few people thought I was wrong – 'what are you doing!' But I'm glad I did it. I just said, 'I'm going to do this'. I just decided, that was it and I booked a gig. I did the gig a week later. I've been playing guitar since then. I'm still playing drums as well. Everything you do, you add on, it's not like you throw things away. Everything you do in the past shapes what you do now. A lot of things I'm doing now are almost a reaction to what I did earlier.

JH Have you considered taking up another instrument, like piano?

OA No, not really. I just want to see how far I can go with the guitar. I do muck around on other instruments. On the Tzadik CD [*The Alter Rebbe's Nigun*], Robbie and I both played a lot of instruments: drums, acoustic bass, horns, everything. But at the moment when I play solo, I just want to focus on the guitar [and] see what I can do with that.

● ON COMPOSING AND PERFORMING

JH Have you started composing on computers?

OA A little bit. I've only had a computer for the last year. I've started fooling around a bit on the computer with the guitar stuff and some of it I'm really happy with. At the same time, there's something about keeping the guitar 'pure' though I hate using that word. There are some nice things that can come out of [using computers with guitar] as well. And everyone seems to be doing something with computers these days.

JH Do you think one day you'll be using computers more than guitar?

OA I'm already using computers a lot; even when you make a record, you've got to master it and you usually do that on a computer. Everyone is using computers whether you acknowledge it or not. I'm sure I'll be using computers more in the future. I don't see myself sitting on a stage with a laptop but you never know. It's definitely easier if you're touring.

(We then digress into a chat about the pros and cons of performing live with laptops and computers, the difficulties audiences have watching live computer music and the convenience of travelling with laptops.)

JH What do you actually do with the guitar and how do you create



the sounds? How can you claim not to use editing or processing with some of the records you've done?

OA Well, there is processing – I'm using effects pedals, I'm processing the music with effects pedals. I'm just not processing the music with a laptop or computer. There's no computer post-production after I do something. I basically go to the studio and record overdubs, stuff like that, but it's all from a guitar and effects pedals really. And the effects pedals are nothing fancy – it's pretty much all pitch shifting, delays and stuff like that.

JH How many effects pedals do you use?

OA I'm trying not to use that many. On average, maybe four or five. It's more how you use effects pedals. I can't deal with things that are obvious, delays that are obvious – I try to trick my effects pedals into doing things they're not supposed to do, utilising them in a way most people don't [use]. A lot of things I do are actually dealing with silence, recording on a delayed silence and then punching in ideas so it doesn't sound as obvious. I'm trying to get away from the attack of the guitar, just hearing the initial attack. Sometimes I punch in ideas into my effects pedals so my guitar doesn't have the attack a guitar would have normally, it does not really sound like a guitar.

JH Do you use the effects pedals all at once?

OA It depends on the situation. When I record, I go into the studio and improvise something. Then I shape it by overdubbing a few tracks, maybe taking the original track away, stuff like that. It's pretty simple, it's not that complex what I'm doing – I think so, anyway.

JH You do all your recording in the studio?

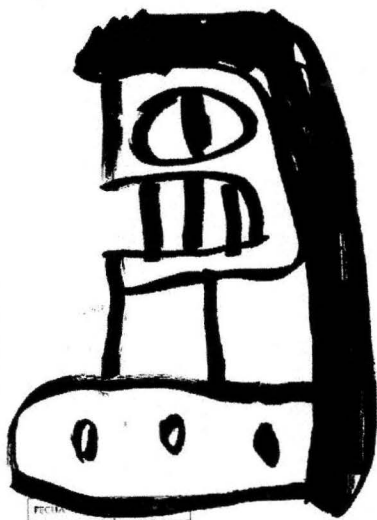
OA Some of it I do here at home. For some of *Insulation*, I borrowed a friend's 8-track to do a lot here. The tracks on *Insulation* that were processed were the Matthew Thomas tracks because they were collaborative tracks where I would send him stuff in the mail, he mucked around with them on a computer and then he would send them back to me. They were processed. Matthew's amazing at what he does. All the other tracks are pure guitar.

JH How did you do the tracks on Stacte?

OA The first *Stacte* was recorded to a shitty 1-track cassette recorder. That was just a live improvisation that I did here on the floor one day. It was just a guitar and a few effects pedals.

This thing is a delay that I can get up to 4 minutes' worth of delay on and on which I can play things backwards. This is a distortion pedal, [this is a] phaser – I've got a ring modulator that I had built for me and then a volume pedal and a pitch shifter. That's it. When I did a lot more crazy punk stuff, I used a lot more effects to the point

R/p



where it was ridiculous after a while. I really want to get a smaller set-up, just for convenience as well. I prefer to hone in on a couple of sounds and work with them instead of having all this stuff around me.

JH I expected that you would have a whole room given over to recording equipment.

OA I can't afford a bigger apartment. I just want to have a minimal set-up. I'd love to have a lot of equipment, that would be fantastic. I probably would [use it all] depending on the project but I like the idea of limiting myself to certain things and the whole idea of *Insulation* was seeing what I could do. It was almost like a problem where I said to myself, 'OK, I just wanna see what I can do with a guitar and effects pedals, see where I can take them'. And I was really inspired by a lot of the electronic stuff happening at the time, you know, a lot of musique concrète, stuff like that. I wanted to see what I could do. I didn't even expect to release *Insulation* in the beginning, it was just a thing I was doing at home.

JH Is there anything in particular you try to achieve in the music or is each project different with respect to goals?

OA ...It's good to set a goal or just have something to start off with and see where it leads you. If it goes somewhere totally different and the results are interesting, that's cool. With *Insulation*, that was my only criterion: where it went, it went. Originally, I was interested in making a really cold record, really detached and not human-like but in the end, that was impossible. It didn't interest me any more once I started doing it. I'm still interested in emotion. A lot of the stuff I've been doing lately is probably even more connected to that; I don't know if it's melodic but it's a bit more in that vein. And I think what I'm doing now is even more minimal after working with John [Phil?] Niblock and people like him and listening to a lot of that stuff which has really inspired me. So a lot of my work is now even more sparse and not as all over the place as *Insulation*. *Stacte* was a bit different because that was the other side of the coin, it was just me sitting down and doing something without thought, and then releasing it [without] thinking about it much. Just a moment really. So that's what the *Stacte* series is about, all three of those records were done quickly, it was really spontaneous. Even *Insulation* was spontaneous but it was more varied, it moved to different areas whereas *Stacte* was one idea, doing it for a lengthy period and seeing where it could go.

JH Do you plan to release any more music in the vein of Stacte?

OA The third one [in the *Stacte* series] has just come out. Everything I'm doing now is in that vein, more so than it used to be – just extended durations, stuff like that.

JH Are you thinking in terms of doing one project that's more structured and at the same time doing another project that's more spontaneous?

OA I'm interested in both those ideas. But I like the idea of longer pieces where you can explore an idea more than showing a little idea and then going to another track and another track which I've already done. Music's always changing, it's hard to say what's going to happen next really.

JH Are you satisfied with what you've done so far?

OA Yes and no – there are always things that could be better but it's a learning [process]. As long as it just keeps moving, I'm happy. As long as I can keep doing it, being able to release things.

JH Do you play guitar the way Keith Rowe does?

OA No, I don't do that – I stand up like a normal conventional guy. He's beautiful and amazing, an important player; I'd feel really weird playing tabletop guitar after someone like Keith Rowe who is just a master... I'm trying not to do what other people do even though it's impossible to be totally original. You're always influenced by everything. I'm not ashamed of being influenced by things that are really important. On one of [my] guitars, I've added another pick-up on the neck to pick up the other notes toward the end. I only did that a few weeks ago and that's opened up a whole new world for me which is interesting.

JH Did you use guitar much on Reconnaissance [album recorded with Martin Ng and recently released on the Staubgold label]?

OA Martin Ng is a turntable player. We're interested in feedback and resonance, stuff like that. One thing we do is put a needle on a turntable, turn it up loud and this weird feedback loop starts to happen where the feedback comes out of the system and the needle's on top of the record but the record's not rotating. And the feedback vibrations get picked up by the needle and they go into the system and back out again. And this weird feedback loop is really mesmerising; you can even lean on the turntable, push down on it and change the notes, almost like a whang bar on a guitar. So a lot of *Reconnaissance* is that kind of idea. Same with the guitar, just feedback loops and ever-changing subtle resonance. Since that, we've done other experiments that are probably more satisfying.

(Oren talks briefly about Martin Ng aka DJ Kevorkian who is also a cardiologist/gene researcher. Ng has a project with Matthias of Farmers Manual, the name of which I shall not try to repeat here as I'm sure to get it wrong but which refers to an amino acid sequence in human DNA.)

JH Do you have any on-going projects at present?

OA I've just completed another record for Touch; I've sent it to them. *Insulation* has just sold out. Martin Ng and I are doing a collaboration with Tina Frank of Mego which will be an audiovisual work – we have a piece that's 42 minutes long, really slow-moving with subtle harmonic changes. She's going to do some visuals for that and that could end up touring as a film. Hopefully we'll release it in some way. We've sent the piece to her and then we'll go to Europe to do it. Martin and I have a lot of stuff in the can that is ready or almost ready for release. Then there's a pop project [called *Sun*] that I've recorded with a friend that will come out in May. Pimmon [Australian electronics sound artist who is also an engineer at a Sydney commercial radio station] and I have been talking for the last two years about doing something together and hopefully that will happen soon. And I'll keep doing solo stuff. At the moment, I'm really interested in textures and moods; taking you somewhere with the music, losing track of time, that interests me. And also holding back, not blowing your load all the time. I'm interested in suspension and just holding things.... I'm interested in moving [where the music goes] – wherever the music goes, it goes. I don't really have a theory, I just play and if the music goes somewhere, it goes somewhere. You make a lot of mistakes and some things don't go anywhere but that's just the way it goes.

JH Do you incorporate any mistakes into the music?

OA Sure. Definitely. That's a way of making it go somewhere, just thriving off a fuck-up. That's really important.

JH Do you go over something again and again? You wouldn't do 20 takes?

OA No, I'm actually pretty quick when I record something. It

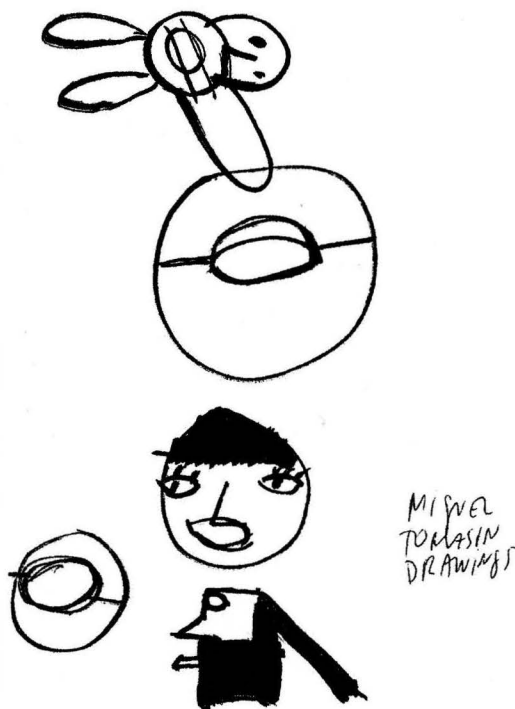
doesn't mean I'll release it. Later on, I'll listen to it, make decisions or throw it away. It's really important to be brutal about stuff and say 'That's not happening', or 'I've already done something like that before better, why do I need to do it again?'

JH How much do you allow external events to influence you?

OA Well, I like to be clear-headed when I do something. That's important. But you get inspired – it's more what I'm inspired by.

JH I ask because on Insulation you had a track ['L'eclisse'] dedicated to your father.

OA My father passed away when he was quite young. It was a horrible experience seeing someone really young and probably more vibrant than me all of a sudden have a brain tumour and not have much time to live. It was an ordeal going to the hospital every day and seeing someone transformed into a different person and then slowly, slowly lose capabilities – he couldn't talk to me, he couldn't move, then he was paralysed, then he was in a coma.... it was, it was [terrible].... after it happened, I realised how over the top it was and ['L'eclisse'] was influenced by all of that and especially towards the end.... the state he was in just before death and just after death, was what that piece is all about [the soul leaving the body and rising].... it's not a horrible, negative piece, I find it a positive thing. I don't know – something about that piece just came out after that experience. You're right, there are lots of things in your personal life that influence you. I probably don't realise it at the time and just [incorporate external influences] 'cos that's what I do in my music. Sometimes in retrospect, you think you can hear something that you've done, that's why that happened.



● ON THE ALTER REBBE'S NIGUN

JH How did The Alter Rebbe's Nigun come about?

OA My family's Jewish, of Middle Eastern origin – I'm an Arab Jew as that article [Naeim Giladi, 'The Jews of Iraq', in *Link*, published by Americans for Middle Eastern Understanding; see <http://www.reemcreations.com/culture/news/>] says, I only discovered that the other day, I'm a Black Panther. [Giladi's article mentions the Black Panthers of Israel, which was a movement formed by Sephardic/Oriental Jews in the 70's to protest against racial, social, political and economic discrimination against them by European Ashkenazic Jews.] Primarily I am Jewish, that's the first thing, and then my family is from the Middle East and it is interesting because

there's this cliché that Jews eat chicken soup and matzo dumplings whereas I grew up eating African food and very Middle Eastern [food], rice dishes, lots of chilli, stuff like that. And all the music I grew up with was Middle Eastern. Ironically, the Tzadik CD is very Eastern European-sounding but that's a totally different story. I grew up in a traditional Jewish family but we weren't religious whatsoever, we didn't really practise anything. When I was about 17, I started reading a lot of stuff about Jewish mysticism, the Kabbalah [a Jewish mystical tradition that began in medieval Spain and which meditates on the origin of the universe, how evil came into being and how humans can overcome it, among other things] and the guy we focused on for that CD, Rabbi Schneor Zalman of Lyady, wrote a text called the Tanya which was basically Kabbalah for the layman really and [which] was a huge influence on the Hasidic movement, specifically the Chabad movement or the Lyubavitch [Hasidic] movement from Russia. Chabad stands for the three intellectual faculties ['chokhmah' or wisdom, 'binah' or understanding, 'daat' or knowledge]. Chabad philosophy was an understanding of God and that should affect your emotions. It was very intellectual. So I started reading [the Tanya] as a young teen searching for meaning. I was heavily, heavily into late-period John Coltrane at the same time, I went through this weird phase where I was this outcast at school, all I would listen to was *Ascension* and I would read this stuff. Eventually I started studying in a yeshiva [Jewish religious college] much to my parents' dismay; it was like a way of rebelling, I took off, left home, moved into a rabbinical college when I was 17 and threw myself into this world of studying. I studied in Sydney, then in Melbourne, Israel and New York. It was a weird phase of my life, I did it for five years. I dressed like a Hasidic Jew, that's what I did, that's what I was. At the same time, I had a weird double life.... during the day in New York, I'd be studying and then at night I would play free jazz, go to gigs and see Cecil Taylor playing. When I met Zorn, I was [still] a religious Jew and I think he must've been taken aback (we were talking about [British heavy metal band] Napalm Death), this was before he had his Jewish inspiration or whatever so I think he must've thought, Who is this guy?.... When he asked [Robbie Avenaim and me] to do a Tzadik CD, I just felt that [The Alter Rebbe's Nigun] was the thing to do. We used to sing all the melodies (that the Rebbe wrote) in yeshiva as a way of reaching a higher level, this devotional thing that you would do when you were drinking, it was like all these ritualistic things you do and that particular melody [on the CD] really was one that influenced and inspired me. When I was in rabbinical college, I did a discourse on that particular melody and what it meant.... It was a bit taboo as well as that melody was only supposed to be sung at certain times [and only] when the leader of the [Lyubavitch/Chabad] movement started singing it... otherwise you didn't sing it. I just thought it was a beautiful melody with a lot of meaning behind it and it made sense to explore that. I was a bit disillusioned with some of the Radical Jewish culture [series of Tzadik CDs]; I didn't find it that radical, a lot of it was just straight klezmer or reinterpretations of klezmer [Eastern European Jewish folk music]. I wanted to do something that really was Radical Jewish Culture, not in the noise sense or extreme music sense, but more taking something Jewish and doing something with it. A lot of stuff happened when it came out – a lot of people were a bit pissed off, a lot of people loved it as well, it was interesting.... It was great to have the opportunity to do that CD. Originally, Zorn suggested we record it in New York with Marc Ribot, people like him, but we said no, we wanted to come back to Australia and do it our way.

(Oren and I talk briefly about the Rebbe Menachem Schneerson (1902-1994) who led the Lyubavitch/Chabad movement until his death and whom Oren met many times. Oren emphasised that, contrary to some media reports, the majority of Lyubavitch Hasidim regard Schneerson, a direct descendant of Schneor Zalman, as a righteous Jewish leader and not as the Messiah.)

OA ...I think... if you're really into [Chabad philosophy], I actually think it's an amazing, stimulating way of life but I had too many other things in my life that were opposing it, it wasn't working for me and I couldn't devote myself. Eventually I stopped doing it. But it's pretty inspiring. The only thing I regret that because I'm Sephardic/Middle Eastern Jewish – both of us are, Robbie's an Egyptian Jew – we couldn't focused on that aspect. This other one was stronger, it was more immediate for me.

JH What's been the reaction from the Hasidic community here and overseas to the CD?

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OA It was interesting because the rabbi who spoke on it was really freaked out. We had a meeting with him and he said, 'Look, you put the picture of the Rebbe on the cover, [the CD] says my name on the back... it's really misleading. Someone's going to buy it and listen to it and not understand what's going on. I want you to recall the whole pressing, call John Zorn and tell him to stop distributing it...' Obviously [the rabbi] didn't understand what was going on. We argued with him about it, then it cooled down after a few days and everything was fine. But I think he was taken aback - I don't think he expected the end result. He's just not aware of that stuff really. There was a shop here, run by another Hasidic guy who absolutely loved [the CD], that was selling it under the counter. So there was a mixed reaction. A lot of religious people loved it. It all comes down to exposure and what people are used to hearing.

...From the [overseas] religious community? I'm not so sure [of the reaction]. I'm not connected with the religious community any more. I don't know. The Tzadik CD is kind of lost in [Tzadik's] catalogue, it's such a big catalogue and we're not like a star-studded Tzadik release. I think a lot of people aren't interested in buying Tzadik CDs because there are so many of them. A lot of people who might actually enjoy [our CD] probably dismissed it because it was on that label. It's fantastic that we had the opportunity to do it and Zorn gave us a budget to record it, he didn't tell us what to do, he just gave us some money and said 'Go and record an album and just give it to me when you've finished.' He was really happy and that was that.

● ON WHATISMUSIC?

JH You started *Whatismusic?* 6 or 7 years ago?

OA With Robbie, out of the frustration [at the] lack of playing opportunities. It originally started as just a 3 or 4-day festival with one thing per night and now it's grown into this monster with a lot of international stuff. We do it in Sydney and Melbourne and it goes for 6 or 7 nights with 5-6 acts per night, all over the place from electronics to improv, underground rock and highbrow contemporary stuff.

JH When you started *WIM?*, what were you thinking at the time? Did you just want a gig? Did you want to give other people a chance to be heard?

OA Yeah but it wasn't so much thought out that it was going to be this big extravaganza. In the beginning, we wanted to do a gig and [then it was] 'why not do another night with someone else, the next night with someone else and another night ...' so we had Machines For Making Sense one night and then we had Phlegm and the Mu-Mesons the next night and it was really, really the extreme highbrow and then extreme underground.

JH So it wasn't really like a festival at the time?

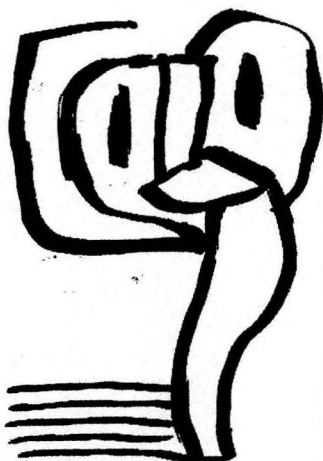
OA No, it was more like a showcase. And then the next year, it became more and more of a festival, it just grew and grew and grew. Unfortunately, it's one of the only things that happen really so a lot of people expect us to put *WIM?* on because they don't have any other opportunities to play. There's a guitarist in Tasmania, Greg Kingston, who's an amazing improviser; the poor guy sits around in Tasmania all year waiting for *WIM?* to come around again so he can play some stuff.

JH So for people like Greg Kingston, *WIM?* is their only chance of playing live in Australia.

OA Pretty much. Add also getting to play with other people and improvise or collaborate with people you've never played with before. It's unfortunate but that's the way it goes. There are other events but few and far between.

JH So that's why you purposely put people, local and international, who don't know each other together to play and improvise.

R/p



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OA That's always been one aspect and it's a good thing; there's an exchange, a lot of international people play with local people and things can happen out of that. For everyone that's good.

● AND LAST BUT NOT LEAST...

JH What do you think of the current experimental/improv scene in Australia?

OA There's a lot of interesting stuff happening here, there always is and [there always] has been. A lot of people are finally getting recognition because they're sending their stuff overseas to get it released or they're going overseas. Seems to be the only way to do things otherwise no-one ever knows what's going on. Here it's very difficult; it's kinda like a no-end situation really, just doing it here and leaving it at that. There is more opportunity [overseas], there are festivals happening all the time, there is news dedicated to that kind of music. Here, even if you're in a rock band, it's a struggle so you can imagine playing this kind of stuff is just really, really difficult and you've got to do it yourself, you've got to put on the gigs yourself, get a promoter yourself - it's difficult.

JH Have you ever thought of going overseas to work rather than stay here?

OA Yeah, all the time [laughs]. There are also good things about a life here because in some ways you're not influenced by all the stuff happening around you, you're just a bit more cut off, you can get into your own world and focus on that. A lot of really exciting individual music happens in situations like that. People who are cut off for a while like Harry Partch.

I don't know if Australia has a flavour but there's definitely a lot of interesting stuff that happens in Australia, 100% and it's just a shame that not that many people know about it. There's no real support for

the arts here as well, the way there would be overseas. It's much more difficult. I've had funding a couple of times and you really have to water down what you do and shape it a certain way; if you come across as being too radical, well forget it. You don't have a chance... You're kinda on your own, doing your own thing with little recognition.

JH I've heard you've been teaching improvisation at a university - is this ongoing?

OA [I replaced] someone for a semester doing a free improvisation class which was a lot of fun. I'd like to do it again if [I was asked] to. It's only an elective that happens every two years so I don't know if it will happen again this year... [The university is] Nepean [this would probably be the Penrith campus of the University of Western Sydney], far away. The kids were really enthusiastic, they transformed over a semester, it was really amazing. I brought in Martin to play, Nick and different people from different schools of thought, so to speak, and it was interesting to see how the kids interacted with them, it was great. For their finals, they had to do solos and collaborations and some of these were fantastic. It was really creative.



SOURCES:

Agus, J.B., *The Evolution of Jewish Thought*, Abelard-Schuman, London, 1959.

Unterman, A., *Dictionary of Jewish Lore and Legend*, Thames and Hudson Ltd, London, 1991.



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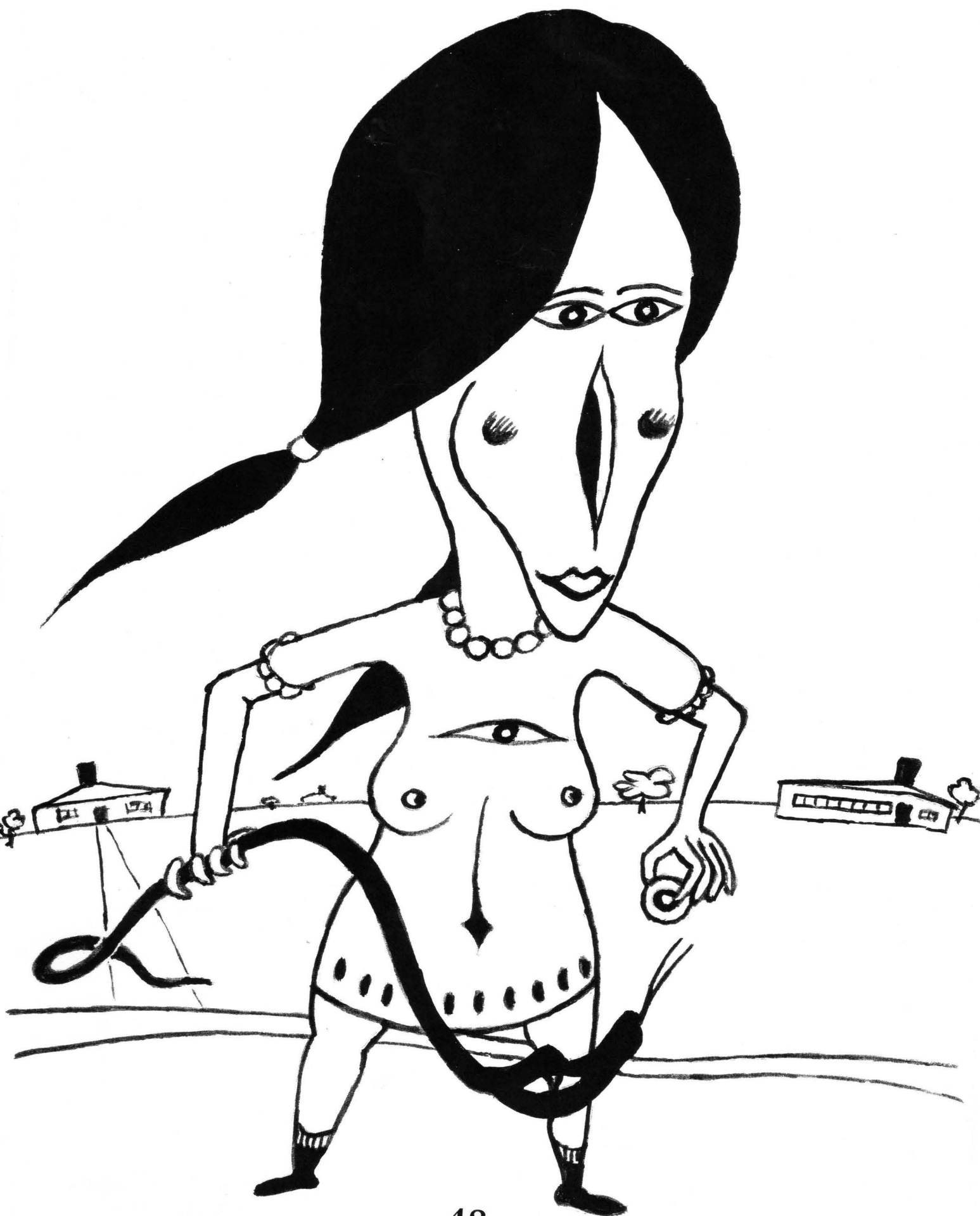
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The *Crackling*

ESTHER (●)

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a wooden interface

Marchetti / Noetinger /

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Werchowski

NEW ZEALAND CORPUS

HERMETICUM HERMES034 CD (2000)

What dark shadows result when an amplified violin dares to cross swords with power electronics... this saturnine disc achieves almost the same level of fulminosity as David Cross, playing violin in 1973 with King Crimson (and check out the essential double CD *The Night Watch* if you aren't clued in *that* scene). Quelle violence! This energetic escapade reaps rich benefits from the violent violin exploits of Mathieu Wechowski, whose impassioned live string-sawing kicks the French electro-acoustic guys into sixth gear. Just three minutes into the first of these long improvisations (both from 1998) and the string player is demanding attention like a hungry cat, leaving the electric half of the act little choice but to produce the finest cuts of smoked salmon from their musical larder. The lively 200-measures-to-the-bar fiddling techniques of Wechowski draw forth robust, lead-lined, triple-strength sounds from Marchetti and Noetinger, who deploy the full panoply of radio-wave and electronic possibilities to create rich, tonal shadows on a par with Greg Toland (who photographed *Citizen Kane*). There's chattering, harsh feedback, soaring glissandos, clear tones and a judicious use of searingly loud volume; a move away from the lugubrious, sepulchral charms of their 'normal' concerts, and also a joyous flight from the slightly stiff *politesse* which sometimes restrains them from overstepping the mark into free-form music. In fine a superb documentary of excellent live playing, inspired electronics, and brilliant free improvisation; they caught lightning in a bottle. Lovely package which arrives printed on a utilitarian recycled card, and depicts the trio as futuristic surgeons in a cyber-clinic, or garage mechanics at Le Mans, or DNA research scientists...or perhaps visitors from a future world where all these jobs are combined as one, within the field of electronic music. For another related CD, see below.

ED PINSENT

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Der Brief

Volum

NORWAY JAZZASSIN RECORDS
JAZZ014 CD (1999)

Just another power electronics trio, to judge from the line-up (synth, guitar/electronics, drums) - albeit one that has been favourably been compared to Ground Zero, amongst others. But no, this Norwegian trio is far from the predictable, heads down, no nonsense sensory destruction bonanza I was expecting. These guys can breathe - their power is as much in what they don't do as in what they do do. There's no histrionics here, no dodgy rhetoric or visuals, no pyrotechnics. These are careful improvisors first and foremost, who happen to foreground electronics. I think of them as an open-weave version of Borbetomagus - you're never in the eye of the storm, assailed but oddly passive as is the case with the NY noisemakers (as great as they are) - you move with them. In common with those superb releases from Erstwhile (see elsewhere in this issue for my ravings on them) der brief make musical and emotional sense out of their uncompromising choice of instruments. Above all, they engage me where so much of this power electronics leaves me cold. They have also taken their time to get it right. This is their first release after six years of playing together. There's enough here in these 45 minutes to keep me happy for some time to come - though a second release well within the next six years would be very welcome.

CHRIS ATTON

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www.derbrief.com

massimo

minimo

THE NETHERLANDS STAALPLAAT
STCD 145 CD (2000)

thilges 3

polka

THE NETHERLANDS STAALPLAAT
STCD 153 CD EP (2001)

**Michel Banabila,
Hannes Vennik and
Bobby**

Cards on the Table

THE NETHERLANDS STAALPLAAT
STCD 153 CD (2001)

At least one of these three mini-CDs from the Dutch Staalplaat label is part of its 'material' series that feature examples of the 'clicks and cuts' genre of electronic music (microtechno, glitch music, call it what you will). Taken together visually, all three are distinguished by rather special packaging. Each CD is the standard 5" diameter, with only the inner 3" as playing area. The unplayable section is left clear or, in the case of massimo, a yellow-gold. Each case is clear plastic, with the (minimal) artist and track details embossed or printed on front and back. The blank inserts for the massimo release comprise gold corrugated cardboard, and vibrate like a Bridget Riley painting. thilges 3 have theirs encased in polystyrene, but the prize for innovation, wordplay and pure kitsch goes to the designer of *Cards on the Table*. Beneath the clear plastic tray lies a square of plasticized Spanish picnic tablecloth, on which sits an actual playing card.

Now I don't know how much these will set you back (and be advised that where minimo and thilges 3 offer thirty minutes playing time, *Cards* is a mere twenty) yet massimo and *Cards* at least are beautiful objects in their own right, perhaps even worth considering buying for their looks alone. Do their musical offerings live up to their packaging?

Thilges 3 present an impressively sustained example of 'microtechno' over thirty minutes. Its beginnings are of a piece with any of the pieces you'd find on Mille Plateaux's recent *Clicks and Cuts 2* triple CD. However fine that release is (especially disc one), thilges 3 push the envelope way

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beyond the 5-7 minute mark that is the standard in the genre. A thirty-minute 'suite' that breaks down its own stuttering beeps, clicks and sub-bass into what sounds alarmingly like free improvisation at times - this is remarkably sustained and engaging throughout. The 'theme' (or 'riff' - both terms are equally inappropriate here) is never lost. Destined to become a classic of its type, at least in this house.

Cards recommends itself as a 'shuffle' composition, its twenty-eight tracks in twenty minutes to be randomised for every listen. First time out it got to me like an automated version of Boyd Rice's lock-grooves; after ten or more plays it comes on more like a Metamkine 'Cinema pour l'Oreille' release, all half-heard voices and non-objective, bafflingly programmatic mise-en-scènes from unlivd lives in Tangiers. That's to say, rather more compelling and a whole lot more hermetic than I'd first bargained for.

Massimo's *minimo* inhabits a middle ground between the two. Its twenty tracks do not programme well either randomly or in the order presented. Each piece is too well-realised, stands too convincingly on its own. It makes better sense to hear these excursions into fractured beats and high, ringing test tones as a set of discrete miniatures. I found myself programming many of these tracks to play individually. This might seem madness when many of them are below the one-minute mark, but the silence around them (and here's a good argument for a programmable silent track, at last) does help them breath. Which to go for on a restricted budget? For sheer musical satisfaction, I'd have Thilges 3, but if you hanker after conceptual delights both aural and visual, it's *Cards on the Table*, no question. If you can bear the programming niceties, try *minimo*. Mind you, if they're a fiver each, I'd be tempted to get them all, but then I didn't have to pay for them in the first place.

CHRIS ATTON

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Distributed in the UK by These Records,
I should think.

Sistol

Sistol

USA PHTHALO15 CD (ND)

Cool rubbery minimal techno loops are the order of the night here - I say night because Sistol has a day job - but after hearing this disc earnestly whirl around for nearly an hour, I find myself saying, *Don't give up the day job yet, Sistol!* - especially as the day job is the very warm-sounding and drippingly seductive Vladislav Delay project. This Sistol CD isn't bad but it is very repetitive, maddeningly so even, as the tracks can

be long yet nothing much seems to develop; much of the music sounds as though Sistol has pulled out the carpet of lush tropical ambience from under the looped recordings and the familiar VD sound effects to force these to stand on their own, naked as it were. Indeed, if I didn't know VD and hadn't heard any VD recordings prior to hearing Sistol, I probably would have said this CD is quite good but is some way off from being a

like electronic minimalism has found its natural home in Finland, not really surprising when you look at that country's contemporary art culture with its minimalist architecture which is practically the classic Finnish architectural style.

JENNIFER HOR

Giardini Di Miro /

Pimmon

Giardini Di Miro vs

Pimmon

2.ND REC / FICTION FRICTION
2ND 001 / FIC 010 10" VINYL LP
(2001)

Electronic chef Pimmon (ie Paul Gough) from Australia crosses swords with this no-hoper Italian rock band...only the Pimmon side appeals to me. He takes Giardini Di Miro's absolutely-nothing-happening Labradford-styled electric piano and guitar murk, and quietly turns it into exquisite, slippery gibberish. Every musical phrase is dipped in olive oil and sent slithering across the hot teflon surface. This method of remixing - called 'bending' by the experts - appeals to me highly. This is a snappy little snackoo. Pressed in clear vinyl. Wowee.

ED PINSENT

www.fictionfriction.com
www.2-nd.com

Jerome Noetinger

and Lionel

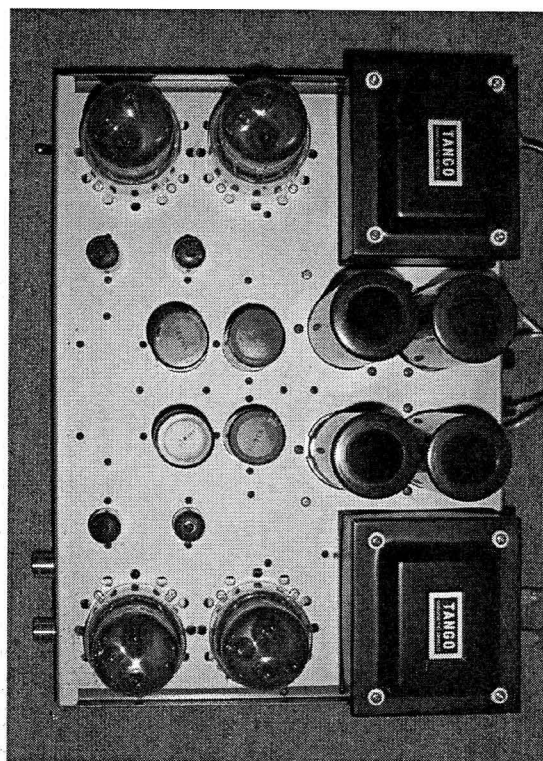
Marchetti

Mort Aux Vaches

THE NETHERLANDS STAALPLAAT NO
NUMBER CD (2001)

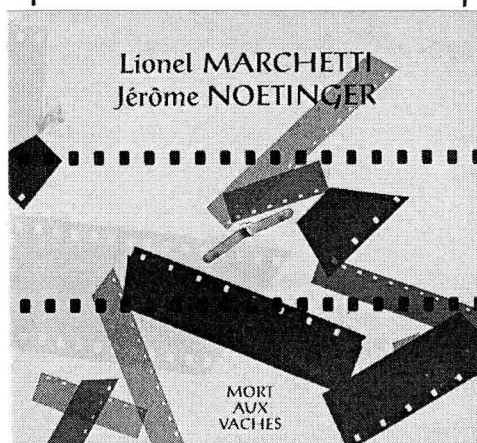
I seem to recall seeing these French guys live at the Spitz in London a few years ago. They're not exactly a laff-riot; their countenances assume a grim caste when they perform, bearing testimony to what must be a solemn purpose to their work; but at all times they have consistently delivered the bacon when it comes to live electronics performances, and musique concrète compositions. Deep, intensive sound explorations are the order of the day, and we ain't talking *pommes frites*. They do it on stage by utilising a whole workshop of electric and acoustic devices - turntables, CD players, radio sets, loudspeakers glass jars, busted toys, and lots of microphones; their steamship trunks, packed with all this fascinating junk and equipment, are always a source of merriment to the ratings down in steerage whenever this duo go on a sailing cruise to promote their work.

When they're really cooking, these two *bonshommes* create a brooding, strange environment, charged with dynamics and excitement. They tune their monitors to show us images of a mysterious other-world, just barely recognisable as the 20th century, filled with crystal radio sets



great CD and I would have told you all to wait for Sistol's next release as it would be sure to improve on this one.

I cannot resist comparing Sistol's take on Finnish minimal techno with the solo efforts of his compatriots, Pan Sonic men Mika Vainio and Ilpo Väisänen. Whereas Vainio's minimalism can be quite severe and inward-looking and Väisänen's minimalism has more drive but is still quite abstract, Sistol is cheery and much less insular. Seems



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malfunctioning and clumsy robots emitting sparks. They progress slowly, but this slowness is part of the deliberation necessary to realise such vivid and deeply resounding sound-pictures. 'I take great interest in assessing, theoretically and practically, the power of recorded sound and the acoustic image', is the proud claim of Marchetti. 'All I care about is my speedboat', counters the high-living Noetinger, as he dons his yachting blazer and roars away to the Riviera once again.

Seriously, this is a fine recording of very enjoyable and finely-crafted electronic sound, and another respectable entry in the Mort Aux Vaches series. 'Mort Aux Vaches' is in fact a political slogan which had great meaning in the mouths of the European revolutionaries who spoke it in the last century. This release is packaged with a typeface uniform to that of releases on the Metamkine label, which (along with the mail order service of the same name) is run by Noetinger. The most prominent series from this elegant label is called 'Cinema de l'oreille', releases to which we have given some coverage in the past, and hence the 'sprocket holes' design on the cover here.

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Arm / Clop Neplat / Jazzkammer / Ka Good Music NORWAY JAZZASSIN RECORDS JAZZ015 CD (2000)

A four track comp of some of the finest electronica mayhem currently flying out from Sweden in these dark days. These four are driven by a sense of restless boredom with existing forms, and a reckless impatience to try anything that works. If they can plug it in, these guys will sample it and try and make music from it. Or failing that, will whip up a bloody delicious racket in nothing flat. Chainsaw heaven for motor mechanics.

Arm's cut is 'Self-employed citizens 1-4'. Four short energised burst episodes in a pile-up. Anarchic beats, screeching electric banshees, and a clunky drum machine. Arm push three or four wayward elements in conflicting directions, savouring the friction of the cross-grain. A real chunky feeling to these big blobby noises. The debut recording by this trio, which makes cut-up tapes using their own improvisations. Motorised hatred.

Clop Neplat - aka Mads Staff Jensen - wallows in a *mauvais quart d'heure* of diseased synth rumblings - his moog has caught a bad case of pneumonia. The doctor is struggling uphill on his bike through a terrible rainstorm, buffeted by the wind.

Jazzkammer blat out 'Great Analog World'. This duo, Marhaug and John Hegre, had a great release called *Timex* on the Rune Grammofon label in Sweden. The intense screaming they wrench from their

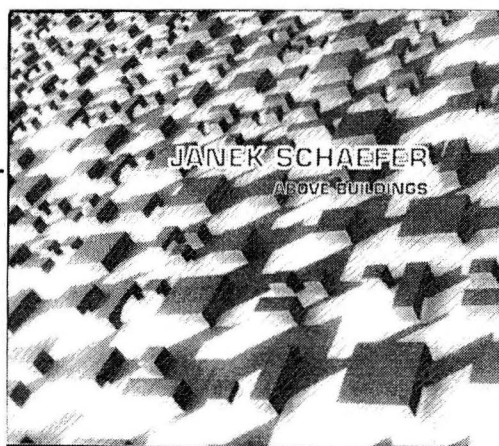
equipment is staggering - imagine a long belt-sander in the factory, fed with an endless supply of steel objects. This is followed by a burst of the familiar rapid-fire sample collage and disjointed sampling mayhem which Lasse Marhaug does with such conviction. After a few listens to this, you too will want to join the Great Analog World and embrace its cornucopia of modernist wonders. If you don't, then suicide is the only alternative. This is no place for loafers.

Ka is a mystical name for a mystical player, who (like Tore H Bøe) was associated with Origami Republica. His 'XV' track is a miniaturist delight, working with small sounds, though the effect is not as intimate as Tore's *Siesta* CD. There's musical boxes, running water, and long unidentifiable passages - which could be a house burning down, or the earth splitting in two. To create 'strange and beautiful atmospheres' is the aim of Ka - and he succeeds, along with healthy dollops of tension and fear. Climb back in your pyramid box, Mr Rothschild.

I like the severe abstraction and tuneless mayhem which runs through this comp. In all a delight to hear such full-blooded commitment to robust electronic NOISE. A welcome relief from the anaemic onanistic bleatings which abound in modern electronica. Put radio sets in the soles of your feet, and start walking.

ED PINSENT

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Antenne Here To Go THE NETHERLANDS KORM PLASTICS KP 3004 CD EP (2001)

Antenne # 1 THE NETHERLANDS KORM PLASTICS KP 3002 CD (2001)

Here To Go is worthless remixes of a vocal smoochy 'jazz' track from Antenne's debut rek, featuring the voice of Marie-Louise Munch. The use of the term 'jazz' is theirs, not mine; I've never understood what it means in this context. Not much, I suspect.

The tedious instrumental backing is bad enough, but I've never heard such an annoying, passionless, and expressionless voice, so lacking in substance; hearing it is like being forced to read a gum wrapper for entertainment while sitting in a traffic jam. None of the five techno-based remixers is known outside of their tiny elite of back-slapping comrades, so their names needn't concern you at this time. If I were you, listener, I wouldn't waste my time wading through their pointless re-editing of what is already a thoroughly boring piece of work.

#1 is the full length debut as referred to above, and it's just as much of a yawner. Antenne is Kim Hansen from Denmark. He seems to have one eye on the main commercial chance, as this limp attempt at minimal electro pop demonstrates. Even demo tapes from the mid-1980s by no-hopers attempting to emulate the success of Yazoo / Human League could not have been as dire as this.

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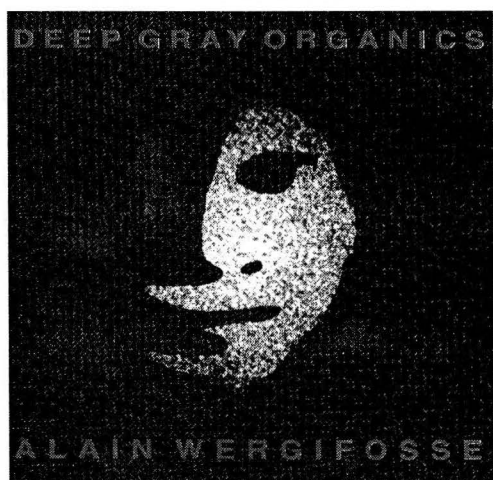


Janek Schaefer Above Buildings UNITED KINGDOM FAT CAT RECORDS FAT-SP02 CD (2000)

This is a studio record, but reflects the techniques Janek uses when he 'does it' in a live setting. It's part turntabling, part needle-scraping and sampling, part documentary recordings. As to the former, well - never satisfied with just an ordinary deck, Janek has built his own devices, including a turntable with three arms. Gosh. As to the latter, for this (his first fully-realised studio statement) he gathers in environmental recordings from international locations, then subjects them to extensive processing, layering and re-sampling in real time. The source sounds were recorded in France, Canada and America; events and places that have fed into this work include Niagara Falls, the solar eclipse as seen from the coast of France, impressions of Las Vegas, and even the discovery of the old Schaefer family organ in Canada. A lot of scope there for emotional resonances to play with - landscapes, cities, travelling, the grandeur of a huge waterfall, the transfixing atmosphere generated by a rare solar phenomenon, and nostalgic family memories. So why does this record seem so empty? Janek tries hard, and delivers a polished finish; but he has some way to go as an artist. He fails to communicate any meanings, or emotions, from the tapes he fetches back from his far-flung travels to use as the source materials. You feel, in the final analysis, that almost any sound would suffice for him, and have achieved the same result.

ED PINSENT

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www.fat-cat.co.uk



Alain Wergifosse
Deep Gray Organics
 SPAIN GEOMETRIK GR020 /
 MICROGAMA MG02 CD (2000)

This one's effectively a solo turn from Alain Wergifosse - he works with treated tapes, loops and live electronics but does it through improvised and spontaneous tactics. The results here are variable - occasionally very moving, occasionally a bit stodgy, but always somehow intriguing. A title like 'Mindscape' doesn't bode very well, nor does its 11-minute length! Although some moments may be close to cassette bedroom recordings, most of the time he's talented enough to transcend the solo-ness of it and achieve a certain profundity. An unusual release from Madrid, an object lesson in how you can make your meagre tools perform like a 24-track studio, if you have a little imagination.

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Vladislav Delay
Anima
 GERMANY MILLE PLATEAUX MP95
 CD (2001)

The term *anima* in psychology can refer to the inner unseen personality as opposed to the outer personality (or persona) or it can refer to the feminine part of a man's personality. VD may have had both definitions in mind with this disc, a single track lasting over an hour and consisting of minimal techno loops, dubs and electronic effects floating in sea of warm repetitive tones that don't change very much throughout. The pieces floating in these seas do change. Lots of choppy reverb adds to the seductive intrigue and helps to hold your attention even though there is not much in the way of obvious musical progression going on (the concept of *Anima* wouldn't permit it anyway). Voices pass in and out like snatches of distant memories. Fragments of sound, texture and rhythm drift by, registering briefly in the conscious mind before disappearing again into the subconscious void. Unusually, the music has a sharper edge than might be expected from

a disc of this nature, purporting to explore the unconscious mind, and from what I expected of VD's arsenal of rubbery effects.

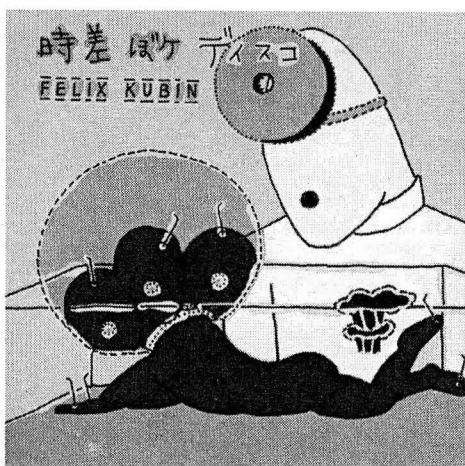
The last few minutes of *Anima* are the most significant: the music changes as if anticipating something, some of the loops go quiet or missing, voices start up (talking about finding a nerve) and then there's the sound of a splash. Someone awakes from a dream (induced?) and while the music ripples like waves of concentric circles in a lake, he has a conversation with someone else and then exclaims *I might stay awake forever*. What soundtrack have we been listening to? A soundtrack to a movie of psychologists conducting

mind experiments on an unsuspecting patient? A movie set in a club where patrons conduct their own mind experiments with designer drinks and pills? A movie of a man searching for his shadow self in his own experiment?

The CD sleeve has pastel shades and chopped-up shapes of a woman's dress which is missing pieces of a large pink flower, allowing the background to show through (the lady herself is not too bothered about this). This is appropriate for the music with its cool minimalism and fragmented pieces, and is quite a work in itself. Pity the design is not credited!

JENNIFER HOR

www.mille-plateaux.com



Felix Kubin
Jet-Lag Disco
 GERMANY A-MUSIK A19 3" CD (2001)

Doesn't a title like that say it all, really? Oh, those poor hard done-by electronica artists, jetting from one international capital city to another, plugging in their laptops at a trendy venue for a highly-paid gig before taxiing off to the airport for the next lap of the circuit. What a miserable life, eh? Actually, half of this mini-CD is quite jolly. Kubin has a line in self-consciously hilarious 'retro' analogue synth sounds and plonky beats, and cheesy toons that promise gales of merriment. The

tracks here chronicle a few weeks in his fast-paced jet-setting life as he runs frantically between studio, airport, hotel and venue, pausing only to take an answerphone message from Mariola Brillowska; even this found tape gets woven into the fabric of the music, her seductive breathy voice turning into a song lyric, almost by accident.

ED PINSENT

www.a-musik.com

Nad Spiro
Nad Spiro vs Enemigos de Helix
 SPAIN GEOMETRIK 23 / MICROGAMA
 01 CD (2000)

Under the blank, anonymous alias of Nad Spiro lurks Rosa Arruti, a leading figure in Barcelona's cutting-edge music scene. In recent years Barcelona has become known as the host city of the annual Sonar festival, a showcase for the audacious and futuristic where Coil rub shoulders with Stockhausen, and there's something wholly appropriate about the fact that this CD originates from there. Arruti has contributed to a number of projects including MohoChemie, Setonil and Pop Eye Spy, but this is largely a solo effort, and a remarkable one at that. The album is alive with propulsive electro rhythms, shiny synth melodies and swirling psychedelic irruptions: the music of the future, if ever I heard it.

The list printed in the insert of 'sounds, words and inspiration' used in the recording gives some idea of Arruti's concerns, although I'm not sure which are the inspirations and which feature more directly. The roll call includes Philip K Dick, David Cronenberg and Wilhelm Reich, all science fiction trailblazers with uniquely personal, skewed visions of the future. Reich, of course, is also known for his pioneering work in the field of the orgasm, and there's something strangely erotic about this music. Arruti's treated voice, more spoken than sung, curls sexily through the graceful synth washes of 'Vitate Raptor' and the bubbling activity of 'Psi People'. Elsewhere, the reference points range from the mesmeric throb of Kraftwerk or Tangerine Dream ('Spectacular Optical') to the dark, nagging headscapes of Nurse With Wound ('Hermanplatz'). Yet Arruti renders such facile comparisons superfluous with the exuberant compositional flair she brings to the whole enterprise.

This is electronic music as it should be. It uses the full potential of technology to create something bright, shiny and new, but is suffused with a warmth and a sense of discovery that keep the human element very much to the fore. Time after time Arruti delightfully fixes on an arresting rhythm, melody or texture and fills the soundworld with it, then swiftly replaces it with another. These constantly changing patterns make for wonderfully engaging listening.

RICHARD REES JONES

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Kim Hiorthoy

Hei

NORWAY SMALLTOWN
SUPERSOUND CD STS046 (2000)

Hei starts promisingly enough but then gets less interesting as it progresses - a pity, as Hiorthoy has some very interesting samples and rhythms on tap, particularly on the 1st and best track, 'Politiska Dikten Återvändar'. As with another Scandinavian act whose CD I reviewed in TSP8, the problem with Hiorthoy is that while he is very able and confident in creating sometimes playful music, he does not seem to push his equipment's potential to its utmost; this whole CD is like a game which amuses him but which does not fully engage his passions (but at least he had fun making the CD, judging from the occasional laughter and conversation in the background). The pace and mood don't vary that much; there are occasional plaintive moments and slightly forlorn melodies which are either too short or forced to stretch over entire tracks without much change or development but apart from these, there isn't much to maintain interest. Dynamic is hardly a word that springs to mind.

The best tracks on this CD tend to last from 3 to 5 minutes. One long track has a good sample of hand-clapping and slapping that could have been brought more to the fore and tinkered with into a really distinctive rhythm texture. As it is, it is just one of many ideas played with and discarded. The production helps little as well: much too sparse, which means nearly all the tracks have more than enough space to allow obscenely wealthy Texan oil executives-turned-politicians to reach Heaven before a fleet of camels passes through a needle's eye.

JENNIFER HOR

www.smalltownsupersound.com

Beequeen

Sugarbush

GERMANY RAUM002 CD
(1995)

The German artist Joseph Beuys (1921-86) is now regarded as one of the most important visual artists of the 20th century. I'm no expert on his work, but I have come across a few examples of it in galleries and museums. Particularly memorable was his long encounter with a coyote, in which he was filmed in close proximity to this unfriendly animal in an otherwise bare room for many hours. Throughout his career he exhibited a fascination with fat and felt, which he was drawn to use as raw materials as a result of having been covered in them, and thereby having his life saved, in a wartime incident. Towards the end of his life he became something of an environmental activist, getting involved in tree-planting campaigns and adopting the position of spokesman for a disenfranchised

generation.

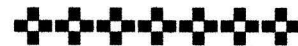
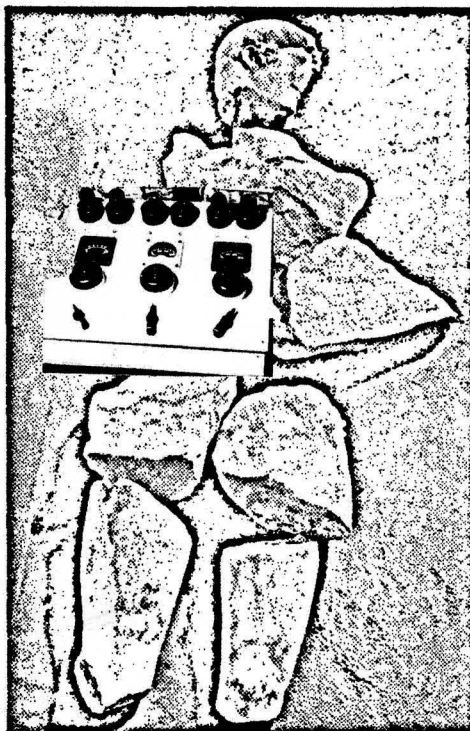
This release by Holland's Beequeen (a duo consisting of Frans de Waard and Freek Kinkelaar) is 'dedicated to and inspired by' Beuys, and repeats the words 'nature, matter, form' (which could be said to be central to his art) in four languages on the insert. However, the parallels break down when one actually listens to the CD. What we have here is an hour's worth of join-the-dots Ambient, its dogged formalism only occasionally leavened by interesting interventions.

The Beuys influence is most readily noticeable in the opening and best piece, '10 Minutes Before The Worm', which has the feel of a processed environmental recording. It begins imperceptibly, with faint clicks and gently breaking waves gradually giving way to insistent sounds of falling water. Eventually a gloomy synth progression comes to predominate, reverberating eerily around the flooded chamber. It's an accomplished mood piece, richly evocative of old, decaying and abandoned buildings.

Unfortunately, Beequeen cannot sustain this level of creativity, and most of the remaining pieces are fairly sterile exercises in layering and filtering synthesised washes of sound. Interest is sparked by radio tunings and softly circling rhythms, but Beequeen seem reluctant to let these elements intrude too much. Only on 'Time Waits For No-one' do things get really interesting, with grinding metallic clashes and focussed blasts of noise. Otherwise the CD is content to meander through well trodden Ambient soundscapes, displaying none of the daring and passion of the artist who inspired it.

RICHARD REES JONES

PO Box 150209, 28092 Bremen, Germany
Distributed by ANOMALOUS



Groenland Orchester

Nurobic

GERMANY STAUBGOLD 13 CD (2001)

Hey, what a brilliant idea! Instrumental electronic music that actually *is* entertaining! Now, how long have we been waiting for more people (since Kraftwerk, at any rate) to deliver on that promise? Perhaps it's something to do with our unfair expectations. In this sphere, any music that's fun to listen to (if it hasn't already been appropriated by dance or pop music producers) is so often associated with superficiality, or 'selling out'. No wonder Tomita packed it in.

This jaunty little record swings along like a jaunty little man skipping along the pavement, and twirling his umbrella. Sure, it's eccentric stuff. But it's compelling. The bright, clean production sound is the first thing that draws you in; the finish of the recording is highly accomplished, as professional as anything that comes out of a big-label sponsored hit factory studio with a big-name producer in the seat, truckloads of expensive technology and lots of corporate money behind the project. Yet this record was probably done on a shoestring! The next thing you notice is the fun melodies, the crisp sounds (the drum sound is particularly snappy) and the use of humour. The Orchester manage to deploy some wacky synth tones, like those which resemble cartoon elephants bleating and yawping, without tipping the balance into out-and-out comedy and spoiling the effect. Nifty.

The Orchester is 'conducted' by just two guys, a couple of European electro-bods who have doing it since 1998. I assume they work through a synthesis of sampling, arranging, programming and real-time playing. Probably this means the computer isn't absent from the process, but it doesn't dominate. Günter Reznicek has played as Nova Huta, and released records of 'cheap organ pop' under that name - which sound interesting, if you're a fan of that candy-flavoured 60s beat-pop Farfisa sound. Jyrge Hall is less prolific, but he debuted on the Staubgold label in 1999 as Gunter Adler with a CD of 'electro pop miniatures'. He's probably contributed something to the discipline of this release. *Nurobic* stands up to repeated listening, simply because it is so tautly constructed; the economy of means, and the ingenuity through which certain effects have been realised, point to an impressive facility in the studio. This up-tempo melodic music is quite a welcome relief from the scads of minimal, dour and serious electronica music I've been enduring of late. Recommended.

ED PINSENT

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Bardo Pond

Dilate

UNITED KINGDOM MATADOR
OLE-459 CD / 2 x LP (2001)

Anyone familiar with Bardo Pond's previous output will think they know what to expect from this, their fifth album. But while it's undeniably recognisable as the work of this band and this band alone – because NO ONE else sounds like Bardo Pond – this is a quantum leap forward in terms of range and control. In the past their sound has always been about leashing the whirlwind, stirring up a vortex, a transcendental sonic dirge before loosing into it the pre-orgasmic angel-moan of Isobel Sollenberger.

Previous releases like *Lapsed* and *Set & Setting* were one blissed-out opium haze, a slow-motion explosion through the wall of sleep into a place where noise and beauty are irrelevant terms and you simply have to take it full on in the face – a storm force sensorial vaporization of all the stupid clichés and labels that fail to explain even one atom of what this band are about. They could have kept on doing that forever and no-one who really gets off on this music would give a toss but, true artists that they are, they want to evolve beyond expectations, expand further out into the possibilities and report back with something unique and poignant and majestic. *Dilate* is that report, received and waiting to be understood by those genuine seekers into the mystery.

The feedback, the drones, the repeated chords drawn out taut over the lightning rack are all intact but reined in some of their excesses and introduced fresh elements to the pyre – acoustic guitars, flute, and a general relaxing of the torque, most clearly evinced in the fact that some of Isobel's vocals are clearly legible. Tracks like 'Aphasia' and 'Ganges' return to the Colonel Kurtz mindscapes they're so good at evoking, while 'Favourite Uncle' is a heavy zephyr of blissed-out blah blah blah.

The spine of the album is formed by the awesome 'lb' which takes off like a rocket and proceeds to explode across the sky, the thundering riff shuddering like a howl from God.

RIK RAWLING

PO Box 20125, London W10 5WA, UK

RIK RAWLING



Matmos

California

Rhinoplasty EP

UNITED KINGDOM
MATADOR OLE 501-1/2
LP/CD (2001)

Matmos is Drew Daniel and M.C.Schmidt, both based in San Francisco and busy enough outside of the studio with PhDs and managing conceptual art departments (at the San Francisco Art Institute) to make me wonder why they bother? I'm glad they do – but this, their first release on Matador, is not their best.

Deliberately, defiantly 'conceptual', their music relies on field recordings layered heavily over a single sound source, be it contact microphones on hair or medical study tapes. Direct comparisons are difficult to pin down; I'd say Autechre, Aphex Twin at his most ambient, and I was reminded of Jim O'Rourke's Merzbow remix 'House of Kaya' with its stark pauses and tone of cyborg dread.

Here be bleeps and bleeps that

any teenager wishing to chance his luck on a one-time only TOTP appearance could easily knock out on a PC using Sound Forge. Sudden lapses into japnoise territory – japnoise on a very low heat, that is – fall back into the usual state of affairs when art meets the dancefloor: silly spooky voices rolled out over a beat like someone hitting a bed with a towel while spoken word samples drift in and out like a bored guest at a party. Nothing new here then but, to be fair, this was their first release and have since gone on to make *The West*, a far more nourishing work that benefits from a unifying theme (check the title) and Dave Pajo's excellent guitar work.

It's all undeniably 'musical' but it lacks something human in its execution, and I don't think their intention was some kind of ghost in the machine ambience. Their preferred sounds are too much of the flesh, too liquid, too protean and very much of the womb to believe that they want to come off like Kraftwerk or any of that crowd.

Track 1 alone is chock-full of moods and drifts but rather than immerse the listener the intention seems to be to impress with its trickery and obscure source referencing. There's obvious talent on display here and undoubted technical ability but combining the two and having nothing to say leaves the listener with nothing but a coldly detached glimpse of two men wanking over their gadgets. It's only with the last track that they achieve some kind of communication – a dense and foreboding piece full of Koner-esque rumbles and shunts, and an ethereal, echoing drone that you could file under 'dark ambient' if you wanted to.

The whole venture pulls in at 27.12 minutes which allows for some painless repeated listens. However, while the complexity of its structure begs for some chin-stroking analysis, like most modern Photoshop graphics images, it reveals itself to be hollow at the core. Knowing they've gone onto do better work means that disappointment is postponed for now. This stands as a hint at what was to come but, on its own, could

easily be lost amongst the rack fulls of 'installation music' clogging up the shelves in your local independent record shop. You'd be better off just going straight for *The West* instead.

RIK RAWLING 10/04/2001

PO Box 20125, London W10 5WA, UK



Electrelane Rock It To The Moon

UNITED KINGDOM LETS
ROCK! RECORDS LROCK
03 CD (2001)

Much has been made of Electrelane being an all-girl band, as if girls are somehow not expected to deliver up something like this: a fresh perspective on 'post rock', bolstered by 80s New Wave bass and guitar riffs and a Farfisa organ squealing away like a turbo-driven calliope. They do manage to evoke that haunted seaside resort ambience they were aiming for with the cover shots – empty carousels,

rainswept beaches, dodgy alleys, broken glass, the smell of chips and a creeping sense of desperation only kept at bay by ennui.

The girls can play, that's for sure, and for the first half of the album you're engaged, you're with them. Instrumentals leave you free to conjure your own images for tracks like 'Long Dark' and 'Film Music'. But they make the classic first album mistakes: repetition, overstaying their welcome and tacking on a shit 'hidden' track at the end that ruins much of what has gone before. Drone piece 'The Boat' is totally at odds with the other tracks and isn't the relief from the bleating Farfisa that it should have been. 'Mother' is a dirge of bad-day Sonic Youth. 'Le Song' is like Stereolab on valium.

Despite all that, this is an interesting album that I will continue to play. Three less tracks and a bit more control (that I'm sure will come with time) and this could have been a storming debut. As it stands it's simply 'good enough'. They will learn.

RIK RAWLING 16/05/2001

www.electrelane.com

Guided by Voices Isolation Drills USA TVT RECORDS IMPTEE2160 CD (2001)

I've tried this band over the years and it's never really clicked for me - until now. My brother-in-law is one of the many truly obsessed GBV nuts that will buy anything Bob Pollard releases, in whatever format, at whatever price. Whilst intrigued by the fervour that the man's work inspires, I could never quite 'get' what all the fuss was about. I tried all the 'classic' albums - *Bee Thousand*, *Alien Lanes*, *Under the Bushes* *Under the Stars*. The production was always shit, the lyrics were too often sub-Genesis nonsense about goblins and robot boys, the playing was trad Yank indie rock. There was nothing there to draw me in, despite a few amusing titles and a recognition that Pollard was one of the few truly obsessed artists in America who you just knew would *never* stop until he was dead.

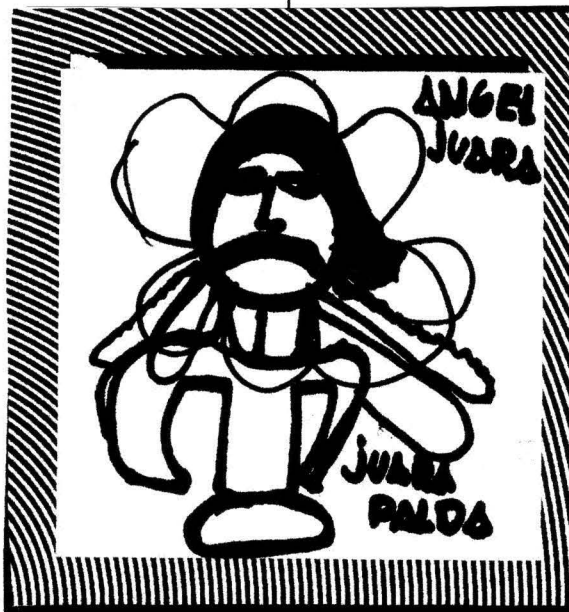
'99's *Do The Collapse* went to the other extreme, of course. Backed by a totally new band and iced with overly-slick production by Ric Ocasek it was

a calculated bid for stardom that seemed to alienate many of the old-skool GBV fundamentalists. This album then, is a return to form - a recognition of past mistakes and a purposeful step

getting all the press right now.

Go Bob. You know what really matters.

RIK RAWLING 16/05/2001



forward. Fuelled by the emotional fallout of his imploding marriage, Pollard has written his best collection of songs to date, songs that dare to say something poignant and true without betraying his surreal approach to lyrics. The themes throughout are guilt, human fallibility and regret, but it never degenerates into maudlin miserablism because Bob just can't help finding the silver lining in the thunderhead and highlights it with soaring choruses. There's some great songs here: 'Twilight Campfighter', 'Run Wild', 'Pivotal Film', 'The Brides Have Hit Glass' - and the band play as tight as a duck's arse throughout. Solid unobtrusive production bolsters their sound. They are hard, they are upbeat, they rock and they are doing it 'cos they love it. Not to get on MTV. Not to 'shift units'. Not to win pointless awards. They do it just for the love of it.

Some fans bemoan that they have peaked as a band and miss the 'old' GBV - the charming ineptitude, the small-town surrealism - but time passes and creative people have to move on, otherwise they stagnate. GBV will never function on the same level as REM, they will always be an acquired taste. Bob Pollard remains a true American artist who will have left an insanely voluminous and significant body of work in his wake - which is more than can be said for half of the twats

Unwound Leaves Turn Inside You

UNITED KINGDOM
MATADOR RECORDS OLE-
469-1/2 CD (2001)

There must be something in the Pacific Northwest temperament that inspires such raw, bleak and yet passionate views of the world as this. Put it down to the weather, I guess. Unwound formed in 1991 in Tumwater, Washington, and over the years have produced a solid body of work that they've toured extensively around the world with, supporting Sonic Youth and Fugazi. Six albums and 700+ gigs later they've been described by Thurston Moore as 'a burning house with punched out lights' which is probably a compliment.

10 years on the fringes of no particular 'scene' at all, Unwound have polished their sound to the gleaming black diamond that it's now become. After grunge, post-rock and the howling vacuum that was subsequently filled by the likes of Papa Roach, this is the best example of what American rock can and should be that I've heard in quite some time. In terms of personal vision and seriousness of intent their only appreciable rivals are Bardo Pond and Godspeed You Black Emperor! - yes, they're that good.

The 15 tracks on this album all hail from the same source - a meld of punk, noise and drones - but it's a testament to their skills and artistic vision as to how far they take these simple ingredients to fashion music that is accessible and yet complex, inspired, emotive and intellectually involving. Compared to just about everything else coming out of the States they sound like an absolute revelation. Anyone despairing of the continual 'dumbing down' of rock should be pointed towards this album quickly before they give up altogether and start getting into The Blues.

While the album works as a cohesive whole with dynamic mood shifts and dense layers of texture, there are inevitably stand-out tracks that had me going back to remind myself how fucking good they were. There's plenty of songs proper, but it's their forays into instrumental territory where they reveal the full range of their dynamic potential. 'Terminus' is a 9 minute+ blowout with a middle section that recalls gybe! at their most strident. 'Radio Gra' and 'Below the Salt', the two closing tracks, stomp all over the legacy of every shit-arse, bandwagon-jumping, post-rock limp-dick outfit you'd care to name. Shades of Mogwai, Slint and Roy Montgomery shudder into view but this is more a realisation of potential so often wasted by chancers that just aren't up to the task. They bring a real weight of experience to the venture and treat their work as the art that it is undoubtedly is.

Once again, the cosmos seeks to find a balance - if the yin is shit like Crazy Town and Godsmack then the yang has to be something of the calibre of Unwound. You owe it to yourself to seek this out.

RIK RAWLING 12/04/2001

PO Box 20125, London W10
5WA, UK



Mogwai Rock Action UNITED KINGDOM SOUTHPAW RECORDINGS PAWCD1 CD (2001)

If we were to infer too much from the ironic title and the notable brevity of the effort (just over 38 minutes) it could be suggested that Mogwai are a bit

R/p



esque shudder of fuzz and nonsense. 'Sine Wave' is very reminiscent of NIN 'A Quiet Place' but holds its own with some disturbingly distorted percussion that works in sharp contrast to the lilting guitar notes and spooked-up vocoder phantom lurking in the background. This unusual beginning to proceedings helps to dispel preconceptions, which is handy when the next track has Stuart

too sensitive when it comes to criticism. Such an observation was made after the release of the 'EP' in 1999 when they appeared to have abandoned the 'quiet/loud' formula in favour of sustained mood and slow burns, and certainly this album is very much a progression from that. But it's obvious from their interviews and their own website that the boys are above such knee-jerk reactions to the piffers in *The Wire* and *NME*. Their motive right from the start was to craft music that transcends the banality of everyday life, that works on the same level as great paintings.

Early tracks such as 'Helicon I' and 'Mogwai Fear Satan' remain powerful pieces, but much of their earlier stuff is Foundation Course work that can be comfortably shelved away. The tracks on this album reflect their growing confidence and maturity and will hopefully influence other new bands who are torn between sticking to their guns or selling out to The Man. Mogwai took their deeply unfashionable music to the masses at a time when the alleged phenomenon of 'Brit Pop' still held the attention of magazine editors and paid opinionators. Now in 2001 we have Mogwai going from strength to strength and Northern Uproar back to their day jobs at Kwik Fit. Justice has been done and time has proved them to be right.

The album is split into 3 distinct parts, each partitioned by almost throwaway minute-long tracks: the ethereal 'O I Sleep' and 'Robot Chant', a Merzbow-

Braithwaite harping on about spaceships over Glasgow.

Much has been made of Mogwai using vocals, as if this goes against some post-rock vow of silence all bands have to sign up to. Sensibly they treat the voice as just another instrument, to be picked up and put down as and when. His breathy, balls-just-dropped tone works particularly well on this track - 'Take Me Somewhere Nice' - with swooning strings fending off fuzzpedal interference.

'Part 2' starts with, for me, the weakest track - 'Dial:Revenge'. It's a bold experiment to use Gruff Rhys of SFA singing in his native Welsh, but somewhere between his vocals and the acoustic guitar it lapses into a tweezeness normally associated with the likes of Belle and Sebastian. Perhaps this would have been better as an instrumental? No doubts about 'You Don't Know Jesus' though, with its slow but aggressive build - but it doesn't quite hit the wall, it pulls back and goes out with an air of dignified restraint, rather than degenerating into a predictable thrash job. There's a real dark undercurrent running through this track but '2 Rights Make 1 Wrong' brings a blast of defiant optimism to the final part of the album. This is the bullseye this album's sessions were aimed at, the culmination of 5 years' development from hopeful young chancers to men of purpose. From the simplest of chords they fashion something inspired, a monumental instrumental that draws in everything from horns to keyboards to banjo (which

betrays their strong influence from Dave Pajo and his Aerial M work) to looped vocal moans and cheers at the end. Put this track on first thing of a morning and no matter how shit a day you face at work, I guarantee this one will give you the psychic ammo to face it with a smile and a rebel heart.

The last track 'Secret Pint' is something of a mellow afterthought but nice drumming all the same. Perhaps it is too short? Perhaps it does finish too soon? Perhaps the Japanese release with the extra track will be more the complete 'Rock Action'? But, petty quibbles aside, this is what those of us who've despaired for so long have been waiting for. Starsailor. Zoot Woman. The Strokes. Muse. Badly Drawn Boy. You can all fuck off. 15 minutes almost up, day jobs sucking you back like the Death Star tractor beam.

Mogwai - 'rock' on.

RIK RAWLING 11/05/2001

Southpaw Recordings. PO Box 20167, London W10 5XF
www.southpawrecordings.com

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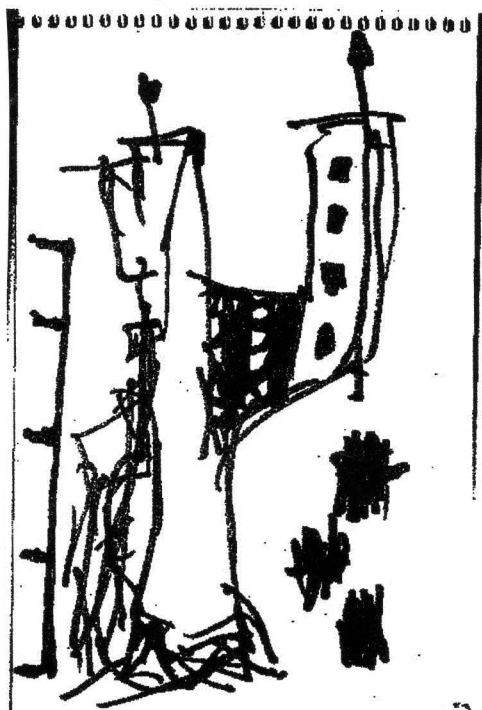
Just when you thought it was safe to go back in the water...here we have yet another in the seemingly endless stream of side-projects generated by Robert Pollard of Guided By Voices fame. At his current rate of output it seems that the man cannot and will not be stopped until he actually drops down dead. Some bands do an album once every five years and call it hard work. This guy knocks one out in an afternoon and then goes off to grill some steaks - and whether or not

you doubt that such prolificity results in a genuine quality of product, you can't argue with the fact that the man will have left behind him a sizeable body of which over which his many obsessive fans can pore for years to come.

While GbV remains his priority action, it's these EPs and one-off slabs of fuck-only-knows-what that serve to illustrate better the mind behind them. Bob Pollard is no fool but seems all too willing to give in to the hyperactive surrealist clown-poet that is his muse. Clocking in at little over 12 minutes this is hardly substantial but interesting all the same, starting with a great title. The band, Pollard and assorted cronies, claim to be 'psychedelic', offering up a 'cohesive mind-meld for the willing'. Hmmm.

7 tracks, just over 12 minutes, here goes:

- ① A child drumming in darkness, the echo of a clanging iron gate and a drunk singing his own mad poetry to an audience of one.
- ② A more atypical GbV song, stripped to the bare bones of drums & guitar over which Pollard assures us that he's 'dirty'. At 1.30 minutes it barely constitutes a song and I doubt your friendly neighbourhood busker parked at the foot of Tottenham Court Road tube station's escalators will be adding it to his repertoire.
- ③ Wet riffs, drowning drones, more mad rants. 'It's A Bad Ticket' - too right.
- ④ 'Satyr at Styx & Rubicon' -



Faustian nonsense with echoing vocals, an eternally-doomed one-chore riff and bass tones echoing up from the bottom of a lake.

⑤ Drunken piano and stuttering bass drum lie hungover in a dirty bed, to be rudely awoken by an angry and insistent beat of the toms. It's the last desperate encore of a particularly drunk and tired lounge act, pissed off with their jobs and contemptuous of their audience.

⑥ Pastoral hippie guitars and poltergeist voices all down the back of the fridge.

⑦ 'Fruit Weapon' – the best Butthole Surfers 'pastiche' I've ever heard. Beyond irony.

This is a glimpse at a madman's sketchbook, a leaf through the pockets of a tramp, a sniff at the air in an abandoned asylum. It would be tempting to dismiss it as nonsense and the product of untaxed minds but there's something, some *djinn* of inventiveness and unfettered creativity caught fast within these grooves, that won't allow me to be so casually dismissive. Few artists are so willing to appear so careless and foolish before their audience, and it's at this point I'm reminded of the sage words of J R 'Bob' Dobbs: 'The stupider something looks, the more important it probably is'.

Maybe 'Bob' is right?

RIK RAWLING
17/04/2001

The Cult Beyond Good and Evil

UNITED KINGDOM
LAVA/ATLANTIC
7567-834402 CD
(2001)

They came back. Not because of contractual obligations. Not because of diminished options. Not because of some warped nostalgia. They came back because the world NEEDS them.

Let's face it – most of this 'Nu-Metal' is fucking shit. It's a dirge, a perpetual adolescent whine, a bedroom tantrum with the volume

turned up. Don't get me wrong, I'm glad the kids are getting off on something that at least *tries* to rock out but the likes of Linkin Park and Sunna are just pissing into the wind. They've jumped on a bandwagon without the scarcest of clues as to the awesome powers they're meddling with. They're like chimps with the atom bomb, they can't begin to comprehend the forces they're trying to control. Better if they leave it to the experts.

The Cult, then, reformed, and judging by current form, revitalised, revved up and ready to tear down the black highway once more. 6 years on from their split - brought about after years of in-fighting and loss of purpose in the face of the horror that was 'Brit Pop' - 12 years on from their masterpiece album 'Sonic Temple', this is the sound of a band with something to say and the weaponry to do it with.

For a start off, it fucking

ROCKS. Not just loud, not just fast, it's tuneful, soulful, amps cranked all the way to 11 and all guns blazing. It is Awesome rock. I pressed Play and the speakers began to shift and swell, bursting up through the ceiling like a mountain range forming. There was already snow at the peaks by the time Astbury unleashed his first 'Baby' on me and by that point I was pinned to the chair, utterly convinced beyond all reasonable doubt that this is the best record ever made. Time may see me revise that opinion but right now this is ALL you need. It is Loud, the riffs are as huge and as punishing as battleships, the drums are Dresden firebombed all over again and Astbury's voice is a Phantom jet soaring over the battleground. Incredible!

The tone throughout is dark, angry, insistent. They're not taking any crap. They acknowledge that shit is fucked up but instead of screaming

'people are shit' and leaving it at that, the Cult suggest that salvation is in our hands. Myth, legend and spirit hold some of the answers to our questions and once armed with the Truth we are ready to fend off the cloying forces of conformity and global bovine braindeath, as promised by the demon overlords who want to brand our very genes for fuck's sake.

Rock clichés are only clichés because they are true and in the hands of the masters they transcend all intellectual arguments. You are left with a very simple choice – does it rock?

12 tracks, not one of them a duffer and some so good that I was unashamedly punching my fists into the air with glee: American Gothic, Rise, Take The Power, War, Speed of Light. The lyrics are mad poetry, full of passion and righteous anger. Billy Duffy's unhinged axe-wielding is fucking amazing to behold. Placed alongside the

likes of Radiohead's latest slab of anaemic drivel it makes it very clear to me how much time I've wasted with some of these pseudo-intellectual avant-garde sheetsniffers. I'm all for experimentation and pushing the envelope but there are far too many utterly talentless twats out there taking the piss with their 'sound installations'.

The Cult have renewed my faith in populist music and its power to cut through the shit and stir the soul. After a hard day busting your nuts for The Man do you want to sulk in the dark with 'Amnesiac' or do you want to punch God in the face with 'Beyond Good And Evil'?

THIS is why I love rock. THIS is why it still matters in the 21st Century and if the Battle of Armageddon is looming then THIS is the soundtrack.

So which side are YOU on? The Cult. Rock. And nothing else matters.

RIK RAWLING
12/06/2001



VOICE CR▲CK

“ We are trying to go fishing all the time ...”

INTERVIEW By Daniel Varela

▲RGENTINA HAS A GROWING INTEREST in experimental musics, and the spaces devoted to uncompromised sound investigations have increased since five years ago. The leading space for these meetings has been the [Argentinian] Experimenta festival, whose first edition was in 1997. In its October 2000 edition, we could see and hear the noise legends Voice Crack. The swiss duo Voice Crack displayed its collection of cracked everyday electronics to obtain a crude sound wall with great effect. Radio-control toys, cheap radios, contact microphones, effect boxes and a big quantity of homemade devices were ruled by infrared controls that modified their variations and entrances. A violent and intuitive exploration in the best of the noise music tradition, which delighted the audience.

Voice Crack members Norbert Möslang and Andy Gühl have dedicated their energies to search sound sources in any available form. Maybe they are not the most eloquent commentators on their own work – a very common situation for many people working with adventurous sound choices. Nevertheless, their answers will provide a clear-cut conceptual frame, and help to explain why their ‘know how’ results in such an interesting, personal and powerful sound world.



DV I know your work and I was very impressed by the fact that you started with acoustic instruments...

NM Yes, our first work was recorded in vinyl by FMP in 1977 during the Total Music Meeting in Berlin. The record was called *Deep Voices* and we played soprano saxophone, clarinet, bass clarinet, some percussion, double bass and also home made devices, springs and other stuff. Some of the devices were applied to the bass clarinet... you could ring modulate the sounds of the instruments, obtaining interesting transformations of special sounds...

DV From that period you've been interested in building your own instruments?

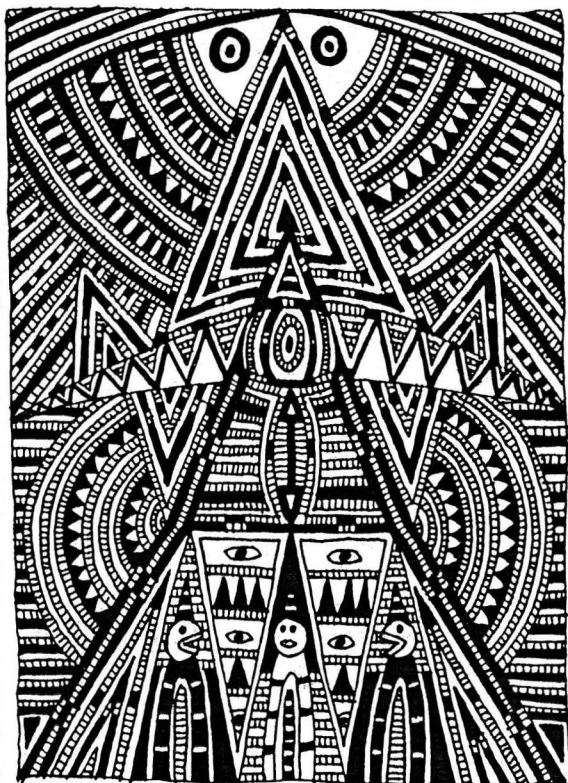
AG We have experimented with electronic music since that time and we did so many things using audio cassettes. These resources and electronic recordings working with loops – aspects that came from electronic music – and after that, all our work is with electronic stuff.

No more acoustic instruments ...

DV Do you feel some affinity with people working with home-made electronics in that period?... I think of people like Michel Waisvisz from Amsterdam...

NM Yes, we know Michel's *crackle boxes* and other experiences around that time but I think that we've tried to do things our own way. We have been interested in things that we could interchange creating our sounds...

AG We have found interest specially in music by Mauricio Kagel, John Cage is also very connected with our interests and the ideas of Luigi Russolo and the Futurism from the 1910s and 1920s... so, it was not the important element to do their same music. We found something very near to the things that we are doing and perhaps we've tried to go in this way... I don't know.



DV It's possible to think in direct Russolo's influence in your music regarding the 'noise' idea?

NM Sixty or more years ago, many people thought about how noise can be also music and they've building their own instruments, this is the historical aspect...

AG We've interested in building mechanical/ electrical objects which we can use as 'our' instruments.

DV How has your music developed from the seventies until now ?

NM Basically, our music was a mix between acoustic and electronic devices from the seventies until 1983. That year was our first performance that we did as Voice Crack and our instruments were called *cracked everyday electronics*. Since then, a lot of new electronic devices are coming out so we are always finds things and doing too much to try... How we can use these electronic objects and how we can modified to use it as specific musical things. So, I think that is a kind of concept which is under development all the time.

DV And what about the idea of your instruments like some kind of musical toys, discoveries or about sound creation- as- a- play?

NM Once you made the first experience, then you look all the things in a different way and you look for ways in you could transmit sounds ... So, you'll find different things to use like basic tools . We are permanently seeking for objects that could produce sounds and that we could transform...

AG Sometimes we look a very simple picture about this and respecting to do our music. For me, is interesting how things are in ancient and ethnological musics in which people hear the sounds from animals, from the wind, the water... they like to create also acoustic things looking for the materials around them and they find different plants, woods, stones and many other things that they use in a mechanical way to produce sounds. They feel good with the sound... In our time we live in another way, listening to the traffic the cars, etc and we can use these sources to create music. From these noises we can take materials around us , found in shops, in the rubbish... we try to create noise as music... is like to take your own pictures

NM Maybe is not a picture about go to fishing...(laughs)

AG We are trying to go fishing all the time, but sometimes your

[line] snaps! And the fish comes but is the wrong fish! (laughs)...

DV Talking about pictures I saw recently a catalogue of sound installations with some of your works. What's your idea about visual aspects of performance ?

NM Surely there's a connection. If we do some installation we think to made pictures that can transform into sounds or made sounds from waves on the air... at this moment we are working in a transformation of waves, tiny waves using infra red equipment and other devices. Sometimes you'll see how pictures are around the space and sometimes we made pictures out from sound. If you don't hear the sound you can just see the pictures. I think that the sound is the most important think in our work but the visual aspect is also important mainly in the installations.

AG For me, the visual work is a normal development from the musical work. We made also sound installations placing our instruments on the wall and on the floor and we tried to make special sounds from lights placed in a special way and produce special sounds. It works like a light instrument and so it's a continuing interest for us.

DV Can you talk about your work at concerts? Have you some previous ideas about the musical parts or is totally improvised?... Are you aware to the immediate feedback from each of you?

NM In concert we're working always in the moments. Depending in the way that instruments acts. The instruments gives you a frame in you can work. It depends too from the concert hall, the lights, the people... We don't have written down anything but we've ideas all the time

DV Your music is generally defined as noise. Have you some reflection about it? Are you agree with this label?

AG Noise is generally taken as a negative label but for me is OK. You'll have to define what is your idea of noise . For us is just music, we play music.

NM Noise has a lot of different sides...

DV Of course noise music involves many different languages. What do you think about the Japanese way to do noise?

NM Yes, we know well Merzbow, Aube, CCCC, Incapacitants and stuff like that. We also played with some of this groups too noisy, too loud... beside of that, our music is like meditation (laughs)... For us it's a very interesting circuit, we have a very good impression on the



scene... they have a different way to make things than the European or American. We have connections with the American scene since sixteen years ago and their feeling about the music is different. Noise music was big in the 80s and 90s and now is experiencing a change... I think that Europe is a really interesting scene in the last years, most are very young people like the Mego label, Raster Music, Bernhard Günter. I have very special interest in the Vienna people working with laptops.

AG ... some of them work with the visual part too...

DV *We could think in the visual work as a kind of fixed piece and the improvised concerts as the dynamic aspect...*

NM In some point yes, but in the installations people can move in different directions and participate in active manner. Concerts and installations are different kind of experiences... the installations can be a kind of performance in which people are the performers or even the instrument.

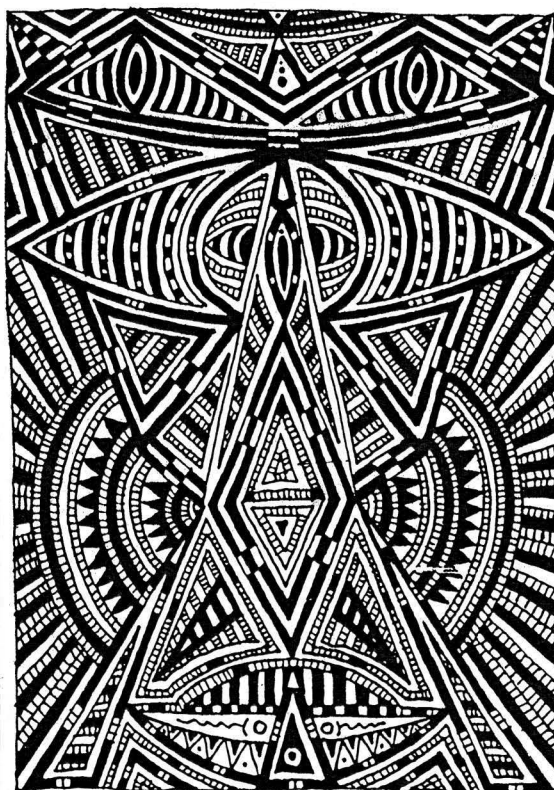
DV *How do you see your activities as part of a wider scene involving free improvisors from different traditions (jazz, noise, classical avant garde)?*

NM In the last few years has grown up a new generation of musicians which don't have connections with free music. Maybe some people came from techno, and I think that is very interesting phenomena. Free music is boring for me now and I think that other places are more interesting, like some techno forms. The developments in the last five or six years has been very interesting and this situation let us play in new venues...

AG We play with many people which is working with laptops that are totally different instruments than ours or the free jazz people used. For us is very interesting to work with DJs or people that collected sounds, like Erik M, Günther Müller or Jim O'Rourke. Respecting Jim, I think that we've influenced him in our use of little electronics and he has influenced us in how to work in the music and its impressions... We are always looking for new cracked materials for developing new instruments.. our instruments go smaller and smaller and perhaps in some years we can make instruments on the wall or paint an instrument on the wall...

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LACONIC LOBSTERS / ART COCKTAILS

Two LIVE CONCERTS ❖❖ at The Barbican
Centre London

Ennio

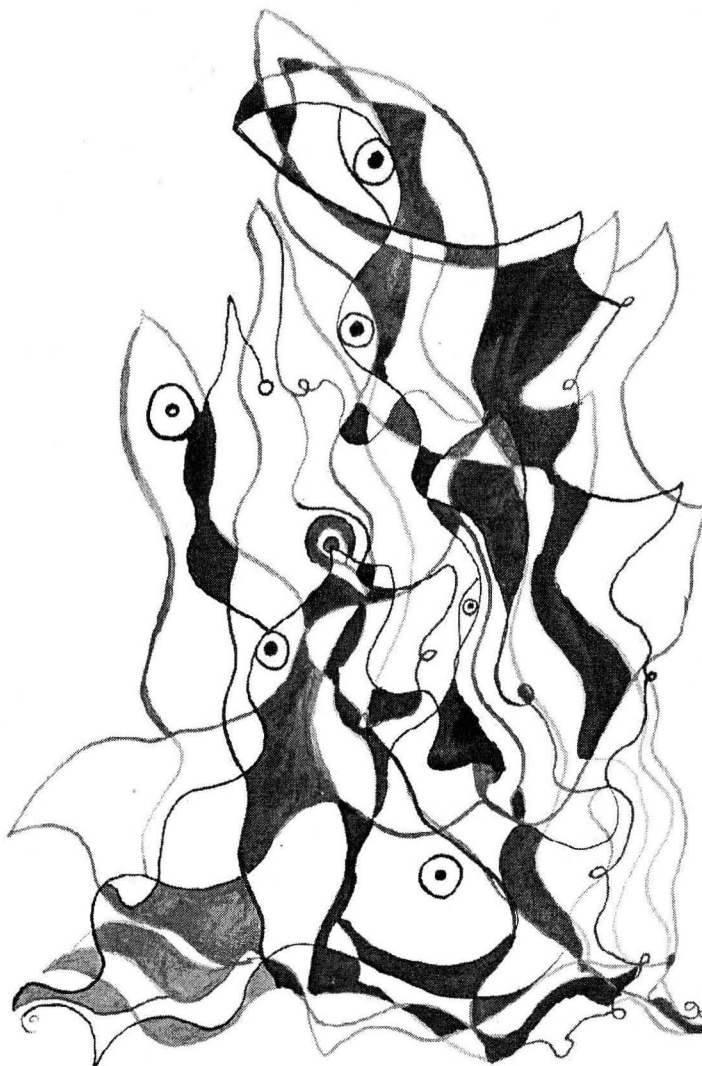
Morricone

The Barbican
Centre, London
9th March 2001

Morricone's first (and probably only) UK appearance. It's moving, I suppose, to see this veteran composer receiving several standing ovations from UK audience, and he deserves them too. But I felt we were applauding him for his career, his unsurpassable contribution to cinema soundtrack history, rather than the performance and musical quality of the night's work.

The evening was pretty lacklustre overall. Not without moments of great excitement, but generally the pace was sluggish, even for the faster compositions. He is frankly not a very good conductor, and took everything at the same pace. I also blame the orchestra, because in my least charitable moments I often find I hate orchestras. They seem to be just classically-trained engineers, not musicians. They read the notes and they get the job done. They rarely have any feeling or heart for the music. (A year ago this was brought home with a vengeance, seeing Stockhausen's work treated like an etherised patient on a table by the jobsworths of an English orchestra). These two factors combined, the great music rarely managed to take off - and that's what it ought to be doing.

On the records we all know and love, we've got quite a different scenario. There's Bruno Nicolai doing the conducting, not Morricone. There's a massive sound stage, and enhancement through recording techniques (that makes the harmonica as loud as a full orchestra, for example). The evening's work comprised two of his classical, non-soundtrack compositions - the first one was a gorgeous droning series of unending harmonics. The second one somewhat more laconic, but still enchanting. Then for act two, a 'greatest hits' package from his film scores. Crowd pleasers. I noticed members of the audience throwing themselves into it, tapping their toes and miming out the actions of the rhythm section. Still, something was troubling me for some reason. What was it? A lack of conviction from the orchestra perhaps, who didn't really connect the music to the stories it was composed to tell. For many of us, we're running movies in our minds when he hear this music; maybe not the exact same images, but a



C.S. '00

composite impression of the story, photography, acting, movements, atmospheres - all the magic of the cinema which Morricone enhances so brilliantly. I think the orchestra here had no feeling for any of this; we're back to the notes-on-paper dilemma as indicated above.

There's also the problem (for me at any rate) of hearing film music re-inscribed in the confines of a 'high art' arena. Morricone's music is great - no question - but does it become 'greater' by being played in a concert hall by a classical orchestra? It can take on an aura of kitsch, or even pretentiousness. Morricone always wanted to be a classical composer. Let's blur those edges.

ED PINSENT

Outsider

Music

The Barbican
Centre, London
22nd March
2001

It hasn't taken long for the precious world of 'Outsider Art' to be ransacked and pillaged by the middle-brow promoters of concerts in the UK. I was troubled in

many ways by the aesthetic and ethical questions raised by this particular show, none of which were addressed by the organisers, or the performers. Outsider Art has a history. One of first to perceive it was the French painter Jean Dubuffet, who coined the term 'art brut' in the 1940s to describe the paintings of 'outsiders', mental patients, lonely people and hermits, and began to develop an aesthetic to help us appreciate the artistic qualities of such work. It had a real effect on his own painting, too. Dubuffet had something of an agenda, I suppose, because he wanted to shake a righteous fist at bourgeois values while promoting this primal, untutored work, knowing full well that its very coarseness would offend the delicate sensibilities of so many middle-brows. But he unwittingly developed an inclusive ideal, that would bring more people inside the fold of artistic endeavour.

Others took up the gauntlet. Roger Cardinal produced an excellent survey of the art, sculptures and environments of outsiders for Studio Vista in 1972. The Hayward Gallery staged an impressive show in 1979, curated by Victor Musgrave (who later founded the Outsider Archive in London). John MacGregor, a psychologist and art expert, published an authoritative work *The Discovery of the Art of the*

Insane for Princeton, which strives even closer to the ideal of inclusiveness; he challenges us 'normals' and our irrational fear of 'outsiders', and dismantles our misunderstandings about mental illness. Through stressing their humanity, he brings these people back into the fold of society.

Since then, *Raw Vision* magazine has diluted the power of this work somewhat, by aspiring to bring it out of seclusion and into the art galleries where it supposedly belongs (a questionable goal at best), so that collectors can buy it. The magazine is packed with full-colour adverts promoting this buying and selling, and is in danger of reducing Outsider Art to just one more commodity. In order to keep the magazine appearing on a regular basis, they've had to expand their brief to include naive painters and folk art of all kinds; arts which, while decorative and charming, have very little to say. But it's fair to point out that *Raw Vision* has published many important essays and surveys; its reproduction values are very high; and it is far from a profit-making organisation.

My friend Russell Christian lent me his copy of the Outsiders catalogue in 1984. He stressed how affected he had been by the show, in particular the work of Henry Darger, the creator of *The Realms of the Unreal* and the Vivien Girls. Darger's hermetic personal history and his stunning artworks, never fail to affect everybody who comes in contact with them. Art Spiegelman later published some full-colour examples of the work in his *Raw* magazine.

Darger's work featured in the first part of this musical evening at The Barbican. The music of Harry Partch was performed live by an American unit called The Microtonal Orchestra while a big back-projection showed a rostrum camera scanning over the images of Henry Darger. Yes, I admit the combination worked to brilliant effect. Just the right combination of lonely and bleak sounds with images of desolation, and the perfect twist of alienation in both. For me to get a quick succession of so many Darger images was like dreaming; an overpowering delirium.

Yet it points up an important distinction. Partch is a fascinating and important composer, but in no way was he an 'outsider'. Yes, he lived the life of a hobo - but only because he chose to. He grew up within a comfortable middle-class environment, chose to escape it for a few years, and was able to re-enter that society. He had maverick views on how to realise his music, but the only way he made them happen was because he was part of society. No denying it was a struggle for him, but he was still an insider. Darger, by contrast, had a severely limited range of what New Labour would call 'life choices'. He was a poor, lonely and mentally ill hermit. To survive, he built up an astoundingly rich inner universe in his mind, an imaginary land where he lived for most of his life. To delineate this world, he wrote enormous unreadable texts describing it, and produced wall-size watercolour paintings to illustrate it. He had no innate talent for writing or painting, so his texts reflect dime-store novels, while the



paintings were produced by tracing comics and magazine illustrations. Technically, this isn't 'great art', yet it's affecting and powerful. Darger was driven to create by an intense, personal need. The imaginary world he created was clearly far more vibrant and vital than the so-called 'real' world, even if it was full of nightmares as well as a strange beauty.

This distinction becomes even clearer when we behold the next abomination the Barbican has in store for us. The music of Carlo Gesualdo, performed over the rostrum-camera images of Joe Coleman. Gesualdo was a 16th century Italian composer who has been dubbed the 'Prince of Madrigalists' by Robert Craft. I love Gesualdo, even though I'm not musically-minded enough to fully understand his work. He created some overpowering mixed chords and weird time signatures - violating the rules of madrigal composition. Again, is he really an outsider? He wrote from a privileged position and had some form of support system that would allow the continuance of his work. Recent studies have now revealed him to be something of a pervert,

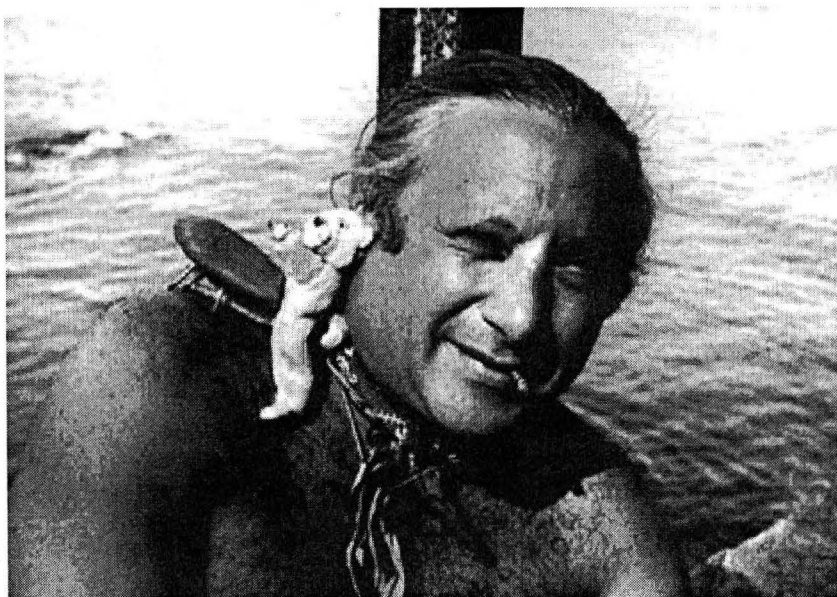
which is probably good enough to qualify him as some sort of 'outsider' in the minds of the mealy-mouthed middlebrows. We all seem to love a good bit of scandal. As to the performance this night, it completely lacked any of the emotional power that Gesualdo's highly-charged work should deliver. The singers simply went through the motions and sang the right notes in the right place.

But this was as nought compared to the musical yawn-a-thon provided by The Dull-gados. I'll pass on that thanks. Coleman's images of decay and oppression get wearisome real quick too, even though this is a better way to see them, so you can observe the hideous details in succession, unencumbered by the poor composition of the originals. Joe Coleman is an American painter who has his supporters; I used to be one of them. I associate him with underground comic art, although he was a latecomer to that area and never does comic strips any more. Outsider? Pull the other one. He knows *exactly* what he is doing. Every taboo-violation that he commits in paint is a calculated button-pushing action; he has it down to a science, and does it by stopwatch like Alice Cooper. He's a showman.

The ethics of this Barbican event need fuller discussion than I can manage, but I hope at least to have breached the issues here. The idea of mixing visuals with music is an attractive one, but I suggest it needs to be done with a lot more consideration, and sympathy for the context of the original sources. None of that compassion was demonstrated by the promoters of this show. It's not the only example of artistic mixing-and-matching going on in the world of so-called 'culture' these days. I sometimes think The Barbican promoters expect us to swallow these combos in one draught, like some jaded fop mixing 'art' cocktails to tickle his jaded palette.

ED PINSENT

UNIVERSAL MINIMALISM



Charlemagne Palestine

Alloy

ITALY ALGA MARGHEN PLANA-P 13NMN.035 CD (2000)

This release, and its sister CD below, offer rare archive tapes from the intermittently brilliant career of Charlemagne Palestine. On *Alloy* we hear two amazing works from 1967 and 1969. It's a shame that CP's ascendancy has been diverted by occasional misfortune, and by the neglect of other so-called fellow 'artists', some of whom couldn't wait to put the boot in. I was taken aback to read a dismissive aside in an 1976 issue of *Studio International* which I bought recently. Steve Reich, in interview, was describing how he had no time for the 'search for acoustic effect...where one repeats, say, piano tones over and over again until one can hear the 3rd, 5th, 7th, 9th or higher partial strikes me as a kind of 1970s version of programmatic salon music'. The footnote by Michael Nyman (who conducted the interview) sniffily joined in this dismissal and correctly identified it as a personal attack against Charlemagne.

Now Charlemagne's time has come, and he ain't no salon musician, pal! His 'redemption' and reincorporation into the canon of great American musicians is continued with these releases. Slam this into your player and first you hear a magnificent electronic tone piece, which you should amplify as loud as you possibly can. It is made of pure golden light, yet has a slightly ragged quality that adds a stuttering texture (and some drop-outs, which testify to the age of the tape). 'Holy 1' and 'Holy 2' are two separate tone works, created in New York City in 1967. The 'late night sonorities' subtitle derives from CP's nocturnal lifestyle at this time, when he became a nightowl producing his best work after midnight, staying up all night working, or out on the streets of NYC with his buddy Robert Feldman, where they would drink in the massive sights and sounds. Building on his growing obsession with the sound-theorist Herman Helmholtz, Palestine set up a series of oscillators in his apartment, gradually adding more of them to build up layers of electronic long tones. According to his story, they played continuously - he would live with this sound, sleep with it with his mattress in the middle of the room. He was married to this music.

One day he just turned the tape machine on and recorded two of these continuous durational tones, effectively making a sonic snapshot of his life at the time, but ending up with the raw material for 'Holy 1' and 'Holy 2'. When commissioned to provide music for a Merce

Cunningham dance work, he put the two tones together. When overlaid, they generate extra overtones that pack an incredible punch. On this CD, you hear the overlaid version. I think there's a limited press LP (already vanished, they tell me) of *Alloy* which separates out the two versions.

He also put them together to use as live tape work in the 1969 performance of 'Alloy', where he's joined by Tony Conrad, Bob Feldman, and his (then) wife Deborah Glaser the soprano singer. The dense, massed sound was created by singing voices, Conrad droning on a home-made stringed instrument, and Palestine bashing the life out of a home-made tubular bells set-up. This is fucking primal energy unleashed here. Such glorious joy in their masterful, unfettered noise, that I genuinely can't believe they got away with it! This is a total, full-on, whole-hearted going-for-it free music, an other-worldly, impassioned holy resonating drone. Leap for joy! By the end of the performance the players enter an ecstasy - and so will you - you can hear a state of bliss settling over the last minutes of the music. Of course, it's anti-intellectual also - my guess is that Conrad here took an immense personal delight in demolishing the authorial role of the 'composer' and bringing the nature of the 'composed' into doubt, fulfilling his personal aggressive agenda. I believe he shared a 'blue collar' upbringing with Charlemagne, a class aspect which might account for the sniffiness of middle-class white boys Reich and Nyman above.

Palestine has (many times) described three of his principal obsessions in sound and music: the drone, which he expresses through long organ tones and electronic tones, and studies of Helmholtz; the clanging of metal, expressed by the bells in the church; and singing, another use of long tones, and which connects to his synagogue singing, and a personal ambition, making peace with God. On this *Alloy* CD, particularly the devastating live work, these three driving forces are combined to spectacular effect. Do not miss this record.

ED PINSENT

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Charlemagne Palestine Continuous Sound Forms

ITALY ALGA MARGHEN PLANA-P 14NMN.036 CD (2000)

Harpsichords, eh? On 'Duo Strumming for Two Harpsichords', recorded in 1978, we've got Palestine and his student Elizabeth Freeman playing those inflexible keyboards of classical antiquity (which require a heavier hitting motion than pianos, as the strings are plucked rather than struck). We've been used to hearing CP's music realised with grand pianos, organs and electronic tones, methods which mostly permit the addition of harmonics, resonances and droning effects through their long sustained duration. The harpsichords require extra machine-like energy from the players to get anywhere near the same effects. We arrive through a mosaic technique which builds up a moiré pattern. On these three long tracks, tension is built up by mixed chords; the chords change, and suspensions are added - but not very often! On the second extract for example, the moirés are overlapped so much it creates a virtual cloud of complex intersecting lines, a very very mixed chord indeed. Whew!

CP met Elizabeth Freeman in the early 1970s in California, and composed this strumming piece specifically for her - he saw immediately how her precise and clear sound 'perfectly fitted' his sonic approach. Palestine was then, and remains, a hands-on guy. It's great to hear these archive tapes from an earlier part of his life. His work is life-affirming, to the extent that he embraces and lives out all the possible contradictions of life, exorcising the miseries along with celebrating the joys, enduring loneliness and sharing a love, lamenting the fuck-ups as well as enjoying the successes. He takes it all on th' chin, and won't efface these healthy, human contradictions from his work.

In 1972 he was sharing ideas and performing with Terry Jennings, a man now passed from this vale of tears, but a man who by CP's account was a near-mystical visionary musician. Although the duo recordings they made are sadly lost, this solo 'Piano Drone' from 1972 survived, and starts with a few seconds of a slightly exasperated Charlemagne opening the door to Terry: 'I'm recording! What is it...that you want?' Terry has come in to collect the rest of his 'stuff'. Whether he remained to hear the sublime acoustic piano work that followed is not known, but the recording is dedicated to the man, and he must be there in spirit. It's a sublime two-and-twenty minutes, one of the very first recordings CP made on the full-size Imperial Bösendorfer piano which he now insists on as standard for live performance. If I knew anything about music, I suppose I could adopt the superior tone of Steve Reich, and identify these simple-enough explorations within a single chord, played in whatever tempo, with equally simple arpeggio inventions. But I don't. Instead, what I hear is a sad dream of holy sunlight in the Californian air, and a combination of achingly beautiful notes that simply makes me break down and weep.

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Ryoji Ikeda Matrix

UNITED KINGDOM TOUCH TO:44 CD (2000)

Didn't like this one at all at first, now I think it's a steely glacial meisterwerk. My scepticism of computer music increases on a daily basis, but the more 'work' I hear from slapdash amateurs footling about with their thousand-pound laptops, the more I can appreciate the monumental qualities of *Matrix*. I saw Ryoji Ikeda doing his thang live at the Queen Elizabeth Hall some time ago - probably at start of year 2000. His music makes a lot more sense when played over a massive PA and with no restraints on the volume - which equals no respect for the eardrums and nervous systems of the listeners. Sure, he works exclusively with 'pure' digital tones - nothing human about it whatsoever - but when played massively loud, these tones assume a scale that commands respect. They penetrate your barriers with a precision that is matched only by the cartographers of the Arctic wastes. In fact, Ikeda's music might make a good scientific tool in that area of research, tracing the contours of empty snowdrifts and formless lumps of ice, by sonar.

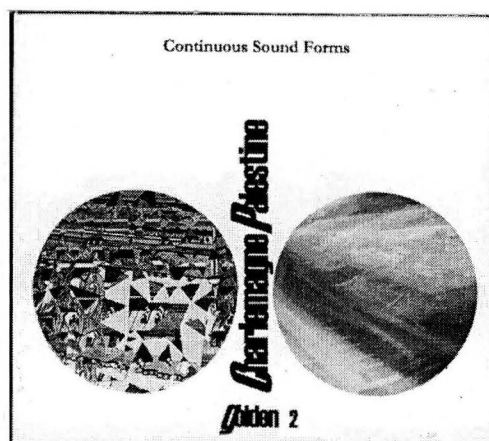
While at the QEHL, he displayed nifty visuals - or incredibly banal visuals, depending on how much patience you're prepared to expend. As I recall, there were two 'modes' of visual stimulation on offer. One

was a series of bands or lines moving across a huge projected computer screen, in time with the 'music'; a network of spidery digital information creating a totally abstract pattern that matched the sounds. The second visual fest was slowed-down footage of young Japanese workers in the Tokyo underground system. Whoever made this video was mainly interested in the white walls of the subway; the human beings were literally framed out of the picture. Nonetheless, they were there. It was halfway between an art installation and an advert sponsored by an airline - which in real terms is probably where Ikeda-san would like to be, both monetarily and aesthetically.

The packaging of this new release is spartan - back to the basics that characterise his other releases for the Touch label. Credited to CCI and Minitron, it's lots of tiny blue squares set in rows, Op-Art style. Inside the gatefold are number series (ones and noughts) instead of track titles, a familiar trope these days which indicates some sort of hang-up about a computer's binary data. I thought we'd all gotten over that one when absolutely nothing happened to computers on 01/01/2000, except they suddenly became more expensive. Well, that shows you how much I know. Absolutely nothing!

Musically, what we got here is two 'versions' of Ikeda's *Matrix* suite, a title that refers to the purely mathematical and to the dictionary definition of the word; matrix can mean 'a place where things or ideas

are developed'. And the ideas here certainly develop - as you'll find if your memory is up to the task of tracing the changes, which is tough work. The second disc is the 'normal' version and is the more approachable of the two - it has that series of stripped-down clicks and bleeps which, on occasion, form patterns and build up to a 'funky' rhythm. There are none of the impertinent voice samples or dramatic edits which clutter up Ikeda's early work - absolutely nothing but



pure electronic tones.

If you think listening to this disc is murder, wait'll you try the 'Matrix for rooms' version. The high tones and bass tones are as ferocious as each other, and round here they caused every plate in the house to tremble in fear (including my dental plate, you young whippersnappers). The sounds proceed to reverberate inside your head as they slowly fill up the room. The idea is that you move around inside your dormitory while the disc is playing, thus transforming the pitches according to your personal needs and desires. Not a new trick, as Charlemagne Palestine, Sachiko Matsubara and others will inform you, but still rendered extremely effectively. I'm getting fitted for the ear-trumpet tomorrow.

A CD like this would make a good trap for destroying my enemies; if I could play it to them loud enough, in an underground chamber, it would shred them alive, slice by slice. There are at least three enemies at my workplace who need destroying; if anyone out there would care to join my revenge squad, please get in touch care of this magazine.

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Jliat

Nineteen Seventy Four

UNITED KINGDOM JLIAT J1974 3" CD (2001)

Yes, a miniature goodie of English Minimalism. Jliat's turning out to be a fascinating English eccentric composer. What's interesting here is how he can take something not his own, a 'found tape' - in this instance, one from 1973 of his old art tutor havin' a tootle on woodwinds with other musicians - and immediately turn it into one of his own compositions. This, through true serendipity; the only way the old tape would play on Jliat's four-track was backwards, and you know how wonderful backwards-tapes are and is. The result is a gorgeous half-remembered, half-fantasised ghost of Terry Riley, 100 years in the future where a more civilised populace than our own has raised that American pundit of the organ and echoplex to the shining godlike status he so richly deserves. Jliat is an artist who knows when he's hit a happy accident, and this one is worth releasing.

Also here is a more fully-realised composition from 1974, with Jliat on his EMS Synthi, sequencer and tape deck. In 1974, how many people rushed out and bought a Synthi, or VCS3, on the strength of *The Dark Side Of The Moon*? Maybe Jliat was one, or maybe he was more prescient than they. The recording here owes no debt whatsoever to the dumb sermonising of Pink Floyd, gramercy, but in a way it answers the first track by being an aspirational hymn to Terry Riley, an icon if you will, full of the devotional fervour of a young art student / composer who has fallen in love with Minimalism. A sumptuous long track that could easily have withstood the hour-length format Jliat accords to his more recent recordings. This mid-1970s brace o'toons is sandwiched either side of a short burst of enigmatic documentary recording which is, we are told, real-life studio ambience from the time. Refer back to my polemic about 'LOVE 1974' and re-imagine yourself back into what you were really doing that year, using this excellent musical foray as a time-travel aide.

ED PINSENT

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Check out the 'silent' Jliat CD in VERY SPECIAL NOTHING MUSIC

Philip Corner

3 Pieces for Gamelan Ensemble (Son Of Lion plays Philip Corner)

ITALY ALGA MARGHEN PLANA-C 12NMN.034 CD (1999)

Philip Corner's an American composer based for some time in NYC. In the 1970s, he got heavily 'into' Gamelan, the music of Indonesia, partly to feed his personal enthusiasm for 'music as wonderful sound', but also because of the metres and measures involved in playing it. He became something of a number-fanatic, loving the precision and accountability that was involved in counting out those long measures.

The 1975 'Gamelan' piece - of which we hear a recording made in 1981 - was written after Barbara Benary had built her very first percussion instrument for the Son Of Lion Ensemble, the Gamelan players based in New York who realise most of Corner's work. The incredibly simple piece he wrote is worked out from an opening strike on the gong and the long resonance that results - followed by a lot of counting. We don't hear the counting, but we do hear a long and measured silence, one whose exact proportions are clearly very important to Corner. As further parts are added to the piece, coming in at a higher tone, the counting times are progressively shortened according to a simple divide-by-two formula. The numerical structure is governing the pace of this piece, even though he allows for a certain inaccuracy in the way people count - I mean, they don't do it by stopwatch!

Corner is not trying to emulate the ways of the East, nor to perform a westernised version of the Gamelan. He's adding ideas from the Orient to the sort of music he writes anyway. He takes Gamelan to mean what 'symphony' means in the West. What typifies Balinese Gamelan? Well, the musicians - most of whom are not professionals nor trained in reading music - work to one of two scale systems, the seven-tone Pelog, or the Slendro which divides the octave into five equal intervals. The music is used for religious rituals, or for a developed form of music theatre. It's part of the life of the entire community in a way that Western music isn't, and it can send players and audience into a trance.

'Barcelona Cathedral' was recorded in 1978. Tom Johnson has described it as 'documentary music' - the composer was trying to replicate, in layers, the exact sound he heard when he witnessed the bell striking at the cathedral in Barcelona. Again, using the instruments of Benary, the Son Of Lion ensemble are conducted by Corner to strike in time, with as many as ten mallets per beat striking different percussions. A diagram for the composition doesn't score the duration of the work, but gives precise instructions as to how the musician should strike, what movements to make, and when to breath. Each tiny action is delineated, made deliberate.

Shall I own up? I absolutely hated both of these pieces when I first heard them, but it helped me when I finally understood what he was trying to do. Corner is exploring the relations between the scale of time, and the space occupied by the music. He succeeds to some extent in creating a form of 'holy' space around you, defining it with

remarkable exactness, and putting you in the middle of a site of spiritual energy where you can meditate. Like Morton Feldman and Koji Asano, this music is of long duration and requires you to make room for it in your life, and take time to listen to it.

'Belum' is a work from 1991 and performed a year later, notable for its addition of Western instruments to the Gamelan ensemble sound. The complex clattering and chiming percussion of the opening gives way to the droning of the strings, woodwinds and horns; it's a more familiar sound, and might make it more of a 'grabber'. This piece works to a long measure (108 bars) which means the composer has to accept a lot more improvisational and intuitive input to the composition. Indeed, the complexity of its structure is such that it only becomes apparent after repeated listenings. With all instruments working to the same five-tone scale, new kinds of harmony are



The Sound 9projector Ninth Issue 2001

achieved.

This is fascinating slow and resonating music which I suggest you investigate. It is quiet and lasts for a long time, and is very touching. It has a genuine spirituality at its core, and it's nice to think that La Monte Young and Terry Riley haven't cornered the market in promoting eastern religions! Corner knows exactly what he's doing, and has evolved an excellent rapport with the well-practised Son Of Lion Ensemble. Just think - even my reservations vanished eventually. I think everyone stands a chance of understanding this sort of work, although it may appear boring and pretentious at first.

ED PINSENT

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Phill Niblock

Touch Works, for Hurdy Gurdy and Voice UNITED KINGDOM TOUCH TO:49 CD (2001)

Niblock is an American Minimalist of no small significance, yet also one with a fairly low visibility – the record racks aren't exactly overflowing with his back catalogue, and perhaps this isn't a bad thing in an age where we think we can 'own' anything and everything, simply by paying the asking price for it. And by that I mean that some things are so important they shouldn't and cannot be offered for sale in the first place. The same 'problem' of availability afflicted Charlemagne Palestine for a while (although, obviously, he is currently enjoying a renaissance as regards his discography!), but with him it was due to personal misfortunes and the kind of inertia that can set back even the greatest minds. Phill Niblock, by contrast, has deliberately chosen to limit the number of releases, since what he prefers is live performances of his works.

Specifically, what he prefers is a high-quality live playback of his tape-works (for most of his works are composed direct onto multi-track tape) under controlled conditions – the optimum situation being inside his own large loft apartment space in New York. Niblock knows a thing or two about playback, how in the live environment the presence of an audience will change the sound; and he understands only too well the limitations of home stereo. Even the best and most expensive systems, for him, don't offer the fidelity, the right frequencies, or simply the sheer loud volume that his work demands. On the other hand, his home equipment boasts four speakers, scads of low-end, high-end and reliable response. If you're fortunate enough, you'll be invited to his home for a small private gathering and enjoy the full-on blast of one of his loud and long tape-work drones. How elitist is that? He is aware that it's equally important to get the work out to people, so he doesn't deny the

possibility of releasing CDs for home consumption. Incidentally, his same reservations about equipment apply to most PA systems available throughout concert halls in the Western world – the only one that recently met his high standards was in a Cathedral in Eindhoven – so don't feel too bad if you're a frequenter of the Naim Audio website.

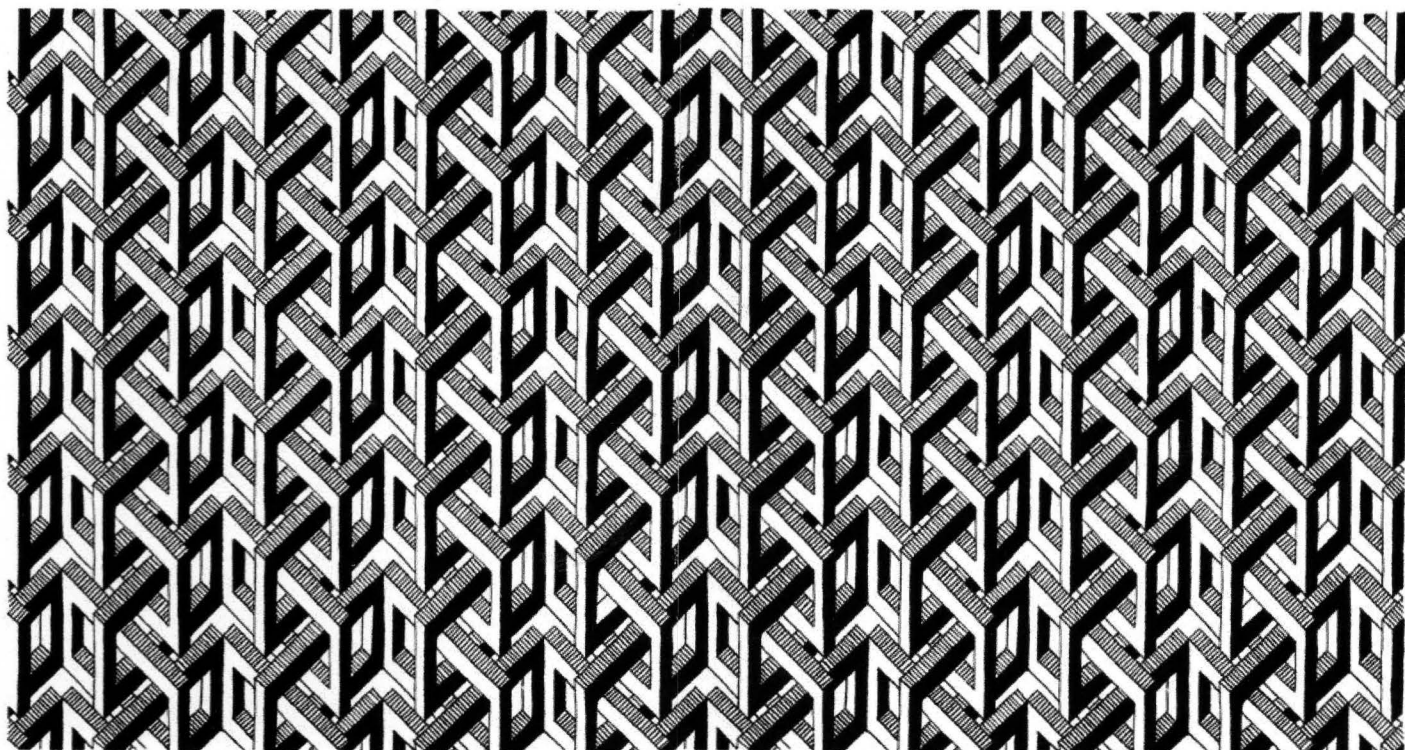
The three long pieces here originated in a Niblock concert at Merkin Hall, New York, from 1999. He composed two new works for the occasion, one using a hurdy-gurdy and the other using the human voice. It is these tape works you will hear, plus a live version of the voice piece (called 'AYU', ie 'As Yet Untitled'). The hurdy-gurdy piece was built out of samples of Jim O'Rourke playing that hand-cranked instrument, and the voice piece comes from the estimable baritone throat-singing of Thomas Buckner. I'm not at home, and I'm playing these now on my sister's small portable CD player and yet with the volume up loud they still sound great to me. One advantage here and now is the bare floorboards and the slight resonances I'm getting from bouncing the sound against a blank wall. For home use, I recommend using as high a volume as you can get without distortion, and perhaps even turning your speakers against the wall (surprisingly effective) for added bounce.

In this excellent release, you get a packed booklet with a sleeve note from Niblock, an interview with him from *Tape Op* magazine by Steve Silverstein, and a very good introduction to the man's work by Kyle Gann which appeared in *Village Voice*. This should help you situate Niblock's achievements within an apt framework; Gann sees him as an overlooked minimalist, and compares him favourably to La Monte Young, detailing the differences in their approaches (Niblock goes for a subtly-changing drone, and deals in exact frequencies, unlike Young who is noted for his insistence on an unchanging fundamental pitch, and tunings in Just Intonation). Niblock trained as a film-maker – he produced a high-contrast film of the Sun Ra Arkestra in the 1960s – and may have more affinities with conceptual and visual art than most musicians. He's had an influence on younger New Yorkers, among them Glenn Branca and Susan Stenger (of Band Of Susans); the latter, as Paul Smith's partner, undoubtedly helped to influenced the release of the double CD *A Young Person's Guide to Phill Niblock* on Blast First.

A superb record which has immediately joined Yoshi Wada, Dumitrescu, Ligeti, Riley, et many others in my personal canon of magnificent deep drone-works. This is amazingly profound and stirring music which can't fail to get into your bones immediately and affect you deeply.

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Cakehole Activity

New Rap and Hip-Hop CDs reviewed by WAR ARROW

Dear Old Blighty

Skitz

Countryman

RONIN RECORDS RDCD2 CD (2001)

Isn't it a bugger that US hip-hop outsells our own home grown talent even here in the UK? Compton or Brooklyn are viewed with a certain mysterious glamour that doesn't lend itself to Bristol or Wolverhampton; simple statistics of money, publicity and marketing are probably as much to blame. Another problem could be a certain lack of identity resulting in the occasional twat who raps about Swindon in a Bronx twang, or reps the UK by carbon-copying beats lifted directly from the rotten apple. This state of affairs seems to be changing. Thankfully. Skitz is a Bristol-based beatmaker of repute, who's assembled some of the absolute cream of UK talent to lend their cakeholes to his mixing desk. In terms of sheer raw ability, he's managed to cram a volume of distinctive voices onto the space of one round shiny thing. If anyone doubted that these shores could produce lyricists on par with Pun or Biggie, *Countryman* smashes such misconceptions like Hulk smashing puny humans. It's pointless singling out individuals for praise as the standard is such that choices can only be guided by personal taste. Alongside bigger names like those of Roots Manuva and Rodney P, I've been truly nuttered by Wildflower, Tempa, and Skinnyman. Wildflower and Tempa being UK females represent a shockingly rare voice in hip-hop. Ladies can spit too, watch out Foxy Brown - blah blah blah - let's just forget all that patronising bollocks from the off - these girls got skills like you wouldn't believe. Move heaven and earth to hear them! Skinnyman, of the intriguingly named Mud Fam, is one of those rare characters that provokes the question 'how come nobody's given this bloke his own TV show?' It isn't only his weird face or potentially record-breaking skinniness, he's just got a fucking great voice. Every syllable is a pleasure to listen to. 'Cor-skinny-blimey!', he says, and I can't disagree with that.



Ty Awkward

BIG DADA BDCD026 CD (2001)

I'd heard Ty was kind of more in line with Tribe Called Quest and all that Native Tongues stuff that never quite lit my fire. For my money, Ty has the superior voice by a long shot. I often found some of that stuff a bit too self-important and fond of using words like 'wisdom' and 'education' without ever elevating the messenger above the level of *Sesame Street* guest star. Ty never dumbs down or patronises or uses the crutches of piss-easy worthiness. This is such a pleasant, chatty, honest album that it really does come over like a personal dialogue with yer man himself there in the same room.



eloquently offering up his life's experiences. Lyrically he's pretty much faultless, and brings out the feel-good factor with gentle understated humour. Belly laughs are easy, but this guy never goes for the obvious route. For example, on the subject of the weave: 'Is it butter or margarine? / I really don't care / Rapunzel, let down your - wait! - Is that fake? - Leave it there!'. The success of this album is not due solely to Ty's being one of those lyricists who effortlessly sustains a full length CD without the help of a thousand guests, but also because the lightly jazzy music acts as a perfect accompaniment to the moods expressed in the words. It has that same fine balance between the smooth and the rough as Sleepy's Theme, albeit on a hotter day with a few perfectly placed African flavours, notably on 'Zaibo' which positively resonates with good feelings and cool breezes wafting across the heat haze. By rights Ty should be massive. Listen to potential number-one-for-the-twelfth-week cuts like 'Mind Made Up', 'Ghetto Perspective', or the previously mentioned 'Zaibo' and it just seems impossible that this verbal giant isn't going to blow up soon. *Awkward* has far exceeded all of my expectations and, given its potential healing properties, should probably be available on the NHS.



Mark B & Blade

The Unknown

WORDPLAY WORDCDJ 010 CD (2000)

Blade's been rapping for ages now and is probably one of the UK's most criminally under-appreciated talents. Certainly the New Cross boy's *The Lion Goes From Strength To Strength* (1993) had the beats and rhymes to crush most of the opposition into sight gags from a *Tom and Jerry* cartoon. Mark B's a bit of an unknown quantity to me. His beats did remind me a lot of that DJ Premier cum Rawkus New York sound, but has differences which render it far superior to much of its potential precedents. He keeps it sparse and uncluttered, but above all irresistibly funky. Remember that painfully embarrassing bit of film where Prince Charles 'dances' in the dole queue in homage to *The Full Monty*? They should've played this and treated us to the sight of Chucky-boy spinning on his head in between triple somersaults. Would've done wonders for his public image. Anyone who gets into UK hip-hop for the money isn't going to last long, but the high standard of UK emceeing has to be due to the fact that it's such a struggle to be heard over here. Blade hasn't lasted this long by being merely okay, so his talent goes without saying. He could sustain the whole disc without the help of guests, but being a proper geezer, passes the mic during a few numbers to Rodney P and Skinnyman amongst others. On this subject, this presents us with the album's only shaky moment. Westwood pops up and bumbles something about dropping the bomb on a baby or whatever. Cuts from *The Unknown* are crossing over onto mainstream daytime radio and accruing praise in the pages of *The Guardian*. Blade's train has arrived. About fucking time.



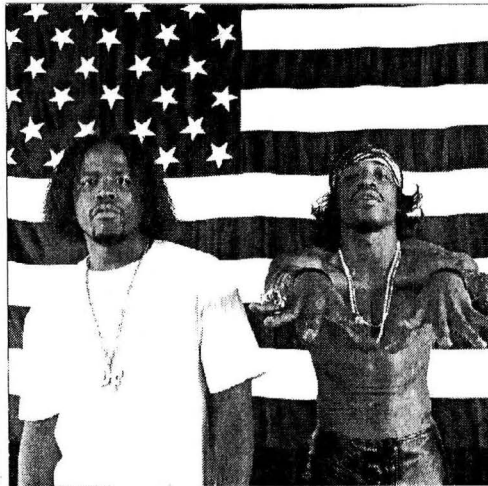
Villains

Welcome To Wolfstown

WOLF TOWN RECORDINGS
WOLFCD001 CD (2000)

Ah... those Villains from Wolfstown (Wolverhampton to us lot). They make music for 'Fraudsters, conmen, convicted felons / horny old slappers with breasts like melons,' amongst others. One thing I love about good UK hip-hop are the references to cash converters, car boot sales, and the like. I've never drank a 40 or eaten a twinkie, so I can only wonder and dream of how the reality of these marvels might feel. Villains, of all the Brits reviewed here, leave no ambiguity as to which side of the Atlantic they're coming from, but it's down to more than the language and references to giros, being skint or pinging car stereos. The music (by IMD and Tricksta) although a distant cousin to No Limit's less-bouncy moments, has roots that run deep into older strands of UK culture like ragga, dancehall, dub, and ska. It's a strikingly distinctive

sound they've got - not only can you tell that it's home grown, but it's pretty hard to mistake for a product of anywhere else. It's also a perfect match for the vocals of Profesah 194 and LATE. Of these two Villains' tonsil operatives, LATE dominates the disc but he's got enough wordplay to keep you coming back for twentieth helpings. At times it's grim stuff, but desperately needs the airtime. The voices from the sprawling council estate don't get heard that much since the brief flurry of punk rock all dem years ago so thank God for UK hip-hop (see also 'The Junkyard' on the Skitz album). You could call this gangsta, but the truth is that Villains are far more complex than can be summed up in such a term. These are tales of real life as experienced by people who don't live in Hampstead or belong to the Sainsbury's wine appreciation society. There's no flim-flams or fakery here, and there's much which is grim, depressing, seething with rage ('Tick tock - my life is ticking away / Get out my Godamn way!'), but there's a lot of heart and soul in these tracks. Buy it and watch out for forthcoming related releases by Vicious Circle, High Timez, and Woltown Committee. Get thee to Woltown before Woltown comes to you.



as this Memphis stuff isn't getting its extremely due recognition in places you normally trust to enlighten you about such things?

Mr. Marcelo From The Ghetto Brick Livin'

TUFF GUYS / NO LIMIT / PRIORITY P2
26159 CD (2001)

I'm told that the majority of artists who've ridden aboard the No Limit tank are atypical of the New Orleans sound, rapwise. New Orleans rap is closer to that wasps-in-a-jam-jar nasal buzz demonstrated by Juvenile, Soulja Slim and Young Bleed - even though he's from Baton Rouge. So it figures that in their ongoing transformation into Cash Money a la Rory Bremner, No Limit should promote a bloke with the voice of a Binatone transistor radio broadcasting field recordings from a sawmill. Equally unsurprising is that he drops his science over squeaky-clean sampled sounds sprinkled liberally with rim-shots going off left, right and centre. Is it Cash Money or is it Memorex?

The unexpected punchline is that it works and succeeds. Mr. Marcelo covers the usual topics of ballin' til you fall and getting one's skrilla, and makes his moves with a flair and originality that elevates him above his contemporaries. The musical ingredients are the same as on *Ghetto Postage* or *Trapped In Crime*, but cooked up with greater care. I know next to nothing about Mr. Marcelo. Aside from being a bit of a terror, he knows more about the history of the Mafia than most members of that particular group of legitimate businessmen. Whatever his story may

be, he's come up with the goods. Probably the best No Limit release since Mercedes did a concept album (*Rear End*) about her own arse. With No Limit soldiers fleeing the tank on an almost daily basis (Fiend, Mystikal, Snoop, Kane & Abel and so on) and poor showings from formerly reliable names, lets hope Master P has the foresight to hang onto this guy. If No Limit is to make a return to greatness then *Brick Livin'* is a damn good start.



Dirty South

DJ Squeeky presents

Tom Skeemask

2 Wild For The World

MO CHEDDAR / RELATIVITY 1649-2
CD (1998)

This one's got Memphis stamped all the way through. Those potent leisurely beats under a contrasting maximum velocity vocal line couldn't be from anywhere but the home of Eightball & MJG or Three 6 Mafia, which is because he's one of the originators of that very sound which the Three 6 went on to popularise. Squeeky's angle is that where the Triple Six scare you shitless with their relentless electronic splatter-film soundtracks, he prefers a much warmer, organic sound. Clearly there's plenty button-pushing behind these beats, although it rarely sounds obvious. Pizzicato strings, electric piano, and wah-wah guitar make for a startling contrast to the work of Squeeky's neighbours. I'm so used to associating the Memphis sound with sleepless nights and soiled trousers that it's actually weird hearing something quite different in the same basic framework. *2 Wild For The World* doesn't shy away from using its rhythmic foundation as a source of great atmospheric tension, framing Squeeky and Skeemask in a dark film setting without suggesting they'll be around later to stick your head on a spike and drink all the ovaltine. Isn't it weird how something as blindingly original



Outkast

Stankonia

LA FACE / ARISTA 73008 26072 2 CD
(2000)

Outkast are fucking great. Their screwy eclectic brilliance has led soppy US mags to ask whether they're really hip-hop. Southern hip-hop is just too adventurous for its own good. The big problem being that Memphis crunk or New Orleans bounce or Miami bass (and the rest) have the audacity to come from somewhere other than New York, and their exponents try to advance their game instead of preserving it in some formulaic formaldehyde. The South has produced a unit-shifting sex-change man/woman thing gender-crossing rapper in the form of Katy Red and, given the notoriously dim view hip-hop takes on such ambiguities, you can't tell me *that* isn't some sort of achievement.

Outkast fall somewhere between Prince when he was good, and George Clinton of the year 3000, augmented by cyber-technology and sent back in time to save us from ourselves. André and Big Boi's modus operandi is hanging around the studio and recording whatever the hell they feel like doing at the time. This makes for an album which is as irrepressibly joyful, and as esoterically uncoordinated as George Clinton's dress sense at its weirdest. 'Gasoline Dreams' chugs along with the volition of early Test Department wearing zoot suits. 'Ms. Jackson' has the sweet-soul power of anything by Sleepy's Theme, with whom Outkast are affiliated, by the way. 'Bombs Over Baghdad' is breakneck drum and bass as it would've sounded had it first turned up on the *Purple Rain* soundtrack. 'Toilet Tisha' is a slow misery-ballad which rips your heart out, not least because the misleadingly amusing title disguises a truly harrowing tale of teen pregnancy.

If there's one thing hip-hop is good at it's evolving and breaking moulds. *Stankonia* isn't turntablist-purist fodder, or ethno-café musings, or thug-gangsta shit, but something else entirely, existing happily without setting itself up in pseudo-moral opposition to anyone, as demonstrated in 'Humble Mumble': 'I met a critic, I made her shit her draws / She said she thought Hip Hop was only guns and alcohol / I said 'Oh hell naw!' but yet it's that too / You can't discriminate 'cos you done read a book or two.' The sheer range of this album, echoed by the bizarre combination of guests (members of Goodie Mob, Cypress Hill, Three 6 Mafia, Sleepy's Theme... and Erykah Badu! - ask yourself when you last heard Kate Bush and Sonic Boom turn up on an Iron Maiden album) proves vividly that with hip-hop writing the map is not the territory. Everyone loves Outkast, even their enemies, and listening to this it ain't hard to understand why.



Triple 6 Mafia Kings Of Memphis - Underground Volume 3

SMOKED OUT MUSIC SMK 9997 CD
(2000)

Sorry to keep banging on about this lot, but they really are that good. This is the third Smoked Out compilation of Three 6 Mafia rarities, oddities and remixes, put out under a slightly altered name to differentiate it from their Hypnotize Minds stuff. There are new versions of 'M.E.M.P.H.I.S.' (from *When The Smoke Clears*) and 'Da Summa' (from *Mystic Stylez*) and the rest, I'm guessing, derives from white labels and demos and suchlike. It's an unusually sombre and soulful collection by Three 6 standards, tending more towards a sort of Memphis Wu-Tang sound, with half heard moog

loops firing away behind the slurred beats and consistently hell-raising word barrage. As such, *Kings Of Memphis* is perhaps a little less immediate, and is generally a bit more raw than recent releases. Notable exceptions being the Wagnerian overload of 'Sleep', and 'Grab Tha Gauge' - another prime slice of creeping malevolence which empties the bowels as only Three 6 Mafia can. Listening to this, it isn't difficult to understand reports of the madness that ensues in Memphis clubs where Three 6 get heavy rotation. This is truly scary music and although 'Grab Tha Gauge' just hasn't stopped spinning around the inside of my head these last two months, you're never going to get me within fifty miles of a club that drops this wild shit onto the floor like the musical equivalent of agent orange that it undoubtedly is. As I wish to continue living, I'll stick to the CDs.



Haystak

Haystak

KOCH RECORDS KOCCD8213
(2001) CD

Remember when every Eminem interview kicked off with questions about his pasty complexion? Every Haystak interview kicks off with a question about Eminem. Him heap big pie-eating paleface, you see. Em's success has led inevitably to the indiscriminate signing of white rappers, many of whom are - surprise surprise - rubbish. Haystak however, has been doing his thing for a while so doesn't fall into the category of crappy Slim Shady bandwagon passenger. I'd been er... fiendin' to hear this due to the buzz that accompanied the allegedly club-tear-uppingly fine single 'Car Fulla White Boys', and it doesn't disappoint. Haystak is a big fat ol' farmboy from Nashville and, no, it isn't country and western, although it covers thematically similar territory: the universe of heartbreak and dead homeboys and existing below the poverty line in which Haystak lives - all very Nashville of course, but in hip-hop terms hardly unique to this particular bad ol' boy. So, unlike with Mr. Shady, there's few chuckles here (excepting the NWA swipe 'Didn't get no play from the ladies / Six crackers in a car - are you crazy?' in the title track) but it doesn't matter. This guy's got a big heart and a lot of soul informing his gritty Southern style delivery. Listen to the drama and heartache of 'Wish You Could See Me' or the warmth of 'Love You Like', a touching tribute to the Haystak Grandfolks that raised him - and there's no doubt that this is genuine and finely crafted stuff. Being from Tennessee, there are musical parallels with the New Orleans bounce aesthetic, as well as the Memphis sound (and note that Eightball turns up on one track) without reducing the album to a parody of anyone else's style. An absolute cracker of a set, if you'll pardon the pun. I don't doubt that Haystak would've still come up even without the current climate of labels falling over themselves to sign white emcees.

Missy Misdemeanor

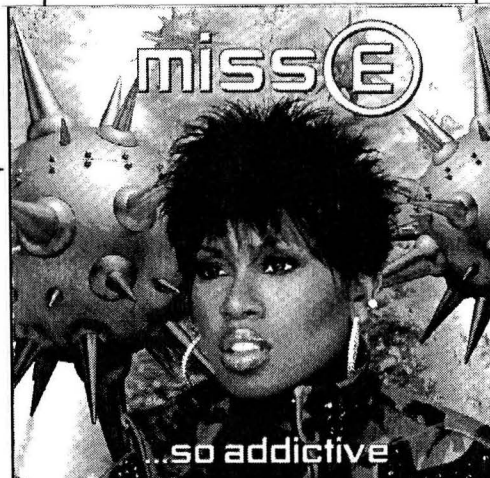
Elliot

Miss E ...So Addictive

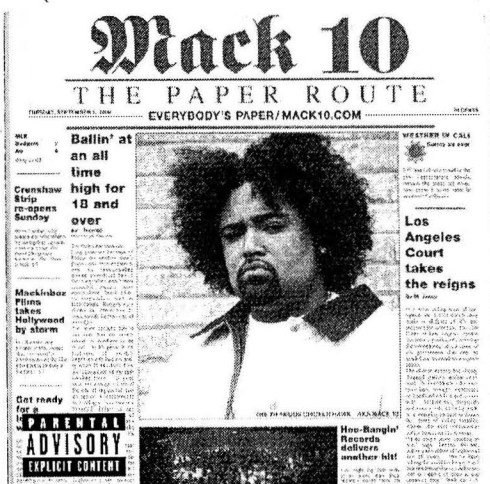
GOLD MIND / ELEKTRA
7559-62643-2 CD (2001)

I'm reluctant to write this album off too soon, but there's a good few cuts here that have yet to really go anywhere. It must be a pisser for Timbaland and Missy to hear the sound they originated being ripped off and bludgeoned to death by everyone from Destiny's Child (who should've gotten around to a second song by now) to ex-New Kids On The Block

animatronic muppets. They seem to be back in the driving seat once more, with sounds that remain distinctively their own whilst placing them in new territory, a good few blocks ahead of the hordes currently xeroxing their back catalogue into oblivion. You'll probably have heard the bhangraesque single 'Get Ur Freak On'. I'm impressed that it manages to surprise and excite blasting out of my own player - closer inspection reveals a similarity to Muslingauze of all people! 'Take Away' is warm, slow and organically sexy just like most R&B was a few years back. 'Lick Shots' shudders and shakes enough to remind you just who it was that put the crunk shit up on a global level. The most surprising development must be Missy's reaction to hip-hop's adoption of disco biscuits as drug of choice by coming up with an alternative universe hip-hop analogy of that acid-techno vibe which sounds so right when 'in the land'. Although I suppose I shouldn't be



surprised as her finest music always had that strange hallucinatory super-real quality. It's the unsettling stop-start-repetition thing, I guess. Ho hum. It's a good album, just not a brilliant album (some numbers tending to bring the average down) as it should be. I guess Missy and Timbaland are still finding their feet in these pastures new. Hopefully they'll get the time to develop and make the next one a killer, before the hordes pounce again and we get everyone from Janet Jackson to Chris fucking Evans's misses churning out pale imitations of 'Slap! Slap! Slap!' and 'Get Ur Freak On'.



West Coast

Celly Cel

Deep Conversation

REALSIDE RECORDS REAL0006-2
(2000) CD

I've never been totally sold on Bay Area hip-hop. E40 sounds too weird. B-Legit and 4 Tay are okay. Much of the music seems too smooth, lacking the aggressive p-funk element that blew up the LA scene in such a dramatic way. On the other hand, I've always had time for Spice 1. The stuttery my-mouth-is-my-turntable thing he does, coupled with his ability to switch seamlessly into ragga-isms without sounding like an arsehole, make for a memorable voice. As an unscrupulous narrator of antisocial acts, Spice 1 is hard to beat. Possibly only Three 6 Mafia are deserving of larger parental guidance stickers, but then references to cannibalism and human sacrifice are probably cheating. Celly Cel reminds me of a sort of apprentice Spice 1, as in he treads the same path with different footwear. That is, he sounds like Spice 1 without ripping him off. His *Killa Kali* album (1996) is a pretty formidable set of grinding funky criminality.

Deep Conversation is nowhere near so immediate as *Killa Kali*, but it still creeps up on you something awful. The whole sound is strangely sparse and clean and er... smooth, but repeated listening pays off and papers over any cracks which may result from a vaguely minimalist instrumentation. And by minimalist I mean in comparison to other hip-hop artists rather than to German labels who name CDs after types of gas. Celly's Bay Area twang, and his forays into Memphis-style speed rapping are well suited to this infectious g-funk variant which, for all its glaringly inorganic qualities, has a warmth one doesn't often get from such a digitised sound. There's a few near-misses and also-rans, notably 'What U Need' which is just too rhythmically esoteric to hold together, but these are balanced out by a general high standard, and a few cherries. 'Which One Is U?' is a superb assemblage of slow beats and pizzicato strings with a ten-to-the-dozen vocal that DJ Squeaky would be proud of. Best of all is 'Nasty' which reintroduces Grip to my CD collection. She seems to have been AWOL since at least 1993 when, at the tender age of 13, she traded quality lines on Ice T's *Home Invasion*. Clearly, her skills are undiminished, although what with now being a little older, the content is slightly different.

Edutainment aside, *Deep Conversation* isn't the best album ever made, and it isn't even Celly Cel's best, but it has some great material and there's nothing here to be ashamed of.

Mack 10

The Paper Route

HOO BANGIN' / PRIORITY 7243 5
28464 0 5 CDPTY 205 CD (2000)

Mack 10 is a member, with WC and Ice Cube, of Westside Connection, authors of probably the beef-iest rap CD ever made. Few elude the connect gang's unforgiving scrutiny on *Bow Down*, and amongst its numerous shirty and morally indefensible masterpieces are declarations of war upon anyone who's ever had any associations with the East Coast, and a mind-bogglingly nutty tirade against Cypress Hill. If you want beef, then *Bow Down* is medium-rare brontosaurus. Mack 10 is also responsible for running the Hoo Bangin' label, and is the author of some durned convincing solo works. Most reviews I've seen of *The Paper Route* list its relatively short duration (caused by CD-ROM stuff on the disc) as a plus, which has

to be a bad sign. It has its moments: the Timbaland produced 'Nobody' which, featuring WC and Cube, counts as the first new Westside Connection cut in a while; 'Tight To Def' on which Mack 10 duets with his wife, T-Boz of TLC, the spawny get; appearances by Kokane, Xzibit, and Techniec; the Caribbean flavoured 'Hustle Game', on which Mack lectures a fan on why being a law-breaking perp isn't cool. Mack 10's cakehole activity is fine, so I guess it's just the beats. First he wanted to drop bombs on New York, as in real bombs. Then everyone saw the error of their ways and drew back the beef curtain that once divided the coasts, if you will. Now it sounds like Mack wants his beats with something in there that New York heads can recognise. So musically, there's an identity crisis going on, resulting in only vaguely memorable tunes. There's a new Westside Connection album due at some point so I suppose this represents a calm spell before the big one goes off a second time.



Snoop Dogg

Dead Man Walkin

DEATH ROW 69467-33349-2 CD (2000)

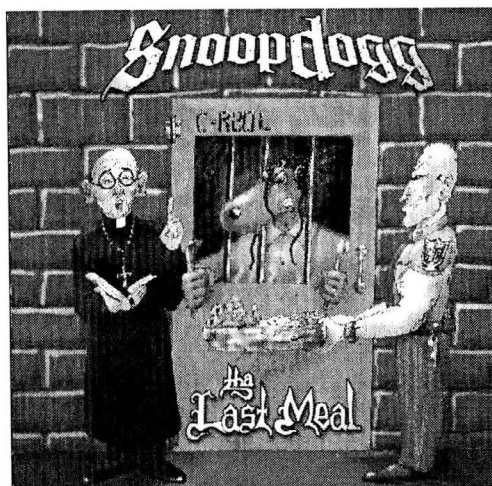
Death Row CEO Suge Knight was recently to be found in the stripey hole. Despite extended detention at a porridge facility, he continued to run the label and wage information war on former acquaintances. Dr. Dre, it seems, is a great big homosexual (as if it matters), although presumably only during the years before and directly following his time on Suge's label. Snoop, apart from not being a real hoodlum, is, it seems, a *Dead Man Walkin*. Oh, very tasteful. Websites allegedly featuring pictures of Snoop superimposed over a target, and this album, with its cover depicting wor fella, a former Crip gang affiliate, toggled up in Blood colours, only serve the cause of making Suge look like a bit of a tit. Not least because this collection of unreleased cast-offs from *Doggfather*-era Snoop is the best thing Death Row have put out in a long time. *The Doggfather* wasn't a mind-blowing CD, but it had some great tracks. It was certainly a long way off being the utter Richard the Third many have claimed it to be. *Dead Man Walkin* brings us more of that DJ Pooh / L.T. Hutton-produced Snoop, and it still sounds good. Above The Law's Cold 187um even turns up to furnish a few tracks - which should raise the full quota of eyebrows. Also, Techniec and Swoop G (the only current Death Row artist that isn't fucking awful) pop in for tea and buns, so that's not an unimpressive formula. *Dead Man Walkin*, irrespective of the fact that its release was intended to disrupt that of *Tha Last Meal*, only serves to big up Snoop even further whilst making Suge look like a tit. So that's me added to the hit list then.

Snoop Dogg

Tha Last Meal

DOGGY STYLE / NO LIMIT / PRIORITY 7243 5 23225 27 CD (2000)

...And this, the latest document charting Snoop's continued rise and rise, makes his old gaffer look even more of a tit. It soars, dropping hit after hit after hit, without mention or acknowledgement of old misery-bollocks and his hate campaign. Oddly, you could almost describe this as healing music in the same way as some of those scratchy old dub-plates. Had a shitty weekend? Did the one upon whom you've been making moves not return your call? Someone been fucking with your programme? Relax. Let yer uncle Snoop croon away that shittiness with these softly



spoken grooves. The Dre produced opener 'Hennessy N Buddah', featuring Kokane at his croakiest and bluesiest best, sets the standard, letting you know that Snoop's been there and he's feeling your pain. Over the next hour we're blessed with enough healing music therapy to raise the dead. The producers and guests have been inspired by the consistently high standard to give it their best. Timbaland has been a little frayed around the edges recently, but there's no denying he's back on genius-level form here. 'Set It Off' is one of his finest joints in a couple of years; its pounding jerky beat, providing a metronome for MC Ren (who still strips paint with his righteous testimonials) and Rage (one gal who's been away for far too long) elevates the whole thing through the roof. Snoop has delivered a rap version of one of those old big cheese festive specials, except the sentiment is for real, rather than produced from a spray can, and despite the cast of thousands, you never lose sight of the host as he passes around that which is good for what ails yer. *Tha Last Meal* is an understated but nonetheless iconic monument to how unique and wonderful this guy is. There really isn't anyone else like the Dogg.

Xzibit

Restless

LOUD / EPIC EPC 498913 2 CD (2000)

Xzibit is a battle rapper: One born with an uncanny power to assault opponents with long strings of impeccably rhymed and wittily observed similes summoned live and direct from a vivid imagination, and to carry on doing so until his target eventually gives up and goes away or, in extreme cases, dies of old age. It's hard not to see the appeal of this shirty little guy with his squinty face and the voice of Butch from the old *Tom and*

Jerry cartoons. He's associated with Tha Likwit Crew, also comprising Tha Alkaholiks and the wonderful King T, flag carriers for anyone who enjoys the odd tippie, or twenty. Having never been one for the weed, this gets my seal of approval. Samples of burping noises and bottles clinking are criminally underused in hip-hop. Plus, it's nice to come across a hard-nosed battle rap veteran who's prone to occasional fits of uncontrollable giggling.

Restless is his third and although *At The Speed Of Life* and *40 Dayz And 40 Nightz* were impressive in themselves, this is just that bit more convincing. This could be due to a wider range of mood and subject, or perhaps the fact that his wordplay sounds more effortlessly fluid than before. Whether casting aspersions on some other poor fucker's talents, delivering a few genuinely touching lines to Xzibit junior ('Sorry I'm Away So Much') or explaining to the missus that he only shags hundreds of other women in order to be able to please her better ('Fuckin' You Right'), he never fumbles or drops the ball once. This is an emcee at the height of his powers. Someone give this man his own show.

East Coast

Big Pun

Endangered Species

LOUD / EPIC EPC 501562 2 CD (2001)

Endangered Species is the big guy's greatest hits, pretty much, with a load of extras thrown in - demos, guest slots from other people's tunes and suchlike. It's not so much one of those posthumous wallet-emptiers, as a final, and fitting tribute to someone who shouldn't have died. The greats, or some of them, are here, notably 'Twinz', famous for that often quoted burst of acapella syllables which upon repeated listening, eventually resolve into 'Dead in the middle of Little Italy / Little did we know that we riddled some middleman who didn't do diddily'. We also get lesser known but equally fine verses from tracks by Brandy, The Lox, The Beatnuts, and (brace yourselves) Ricky Martin, amongst others, which is nice, although I can live without Mr. La Vida Loca's bit. A reasonable portion of this album is new to me, but even the stuff I know well, still sounds fresh. The closing track, 'How We Roll '98' with backing vocals from Pun's kids, and yer man flowing like a bastard over sepiatinted bitter-sweet soul, is well chosen. It brought a lump to my throat anyway. A lot of folks are still hurting over Pun's death and this is a fine and respectful compilation which shows you just why he's going to be remembered fondly and for a long time.



Wu-Tang Clan

The W

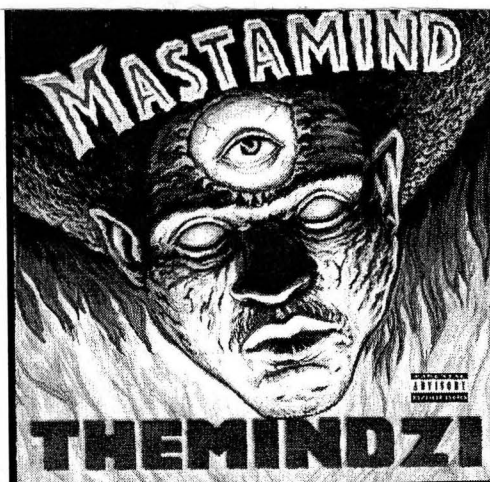
LOUD / EPIC EPC 499576 CD (2000)

Everyone expected this to be disappointing, as have been many Wu-related side projects, and *Wu-Tang Forever*; this album's sprawling inscrutable predecessor, the whole Clan moved to Los Angeles in order to record *The W* without the distraction of familiar surroundings. I think they recorded about 40-ish tracks in all, in order to skim off the cream for this single CD. It's worked!

The worst kind of Wu track features unmemorable and needlessly surreal emcees talking to themselves over one of those RZA tracks that just farts along inoffensively for a few minutes. Nought like that here though. They haven't sounded so fresh in a long time. The music is as wonderfully grimy and gas-powered as



on the first album, half heard samples of soul classics bolted onto big lumps of chunky rhythm and slab-like basslines. The verbals still wander thematically off to Jupiter and back again, but with some obscure purpose. There's a few guest spots. Snoop duets with ODB, whose absence from every other track is due to being an escaped convict at the time of recording, the naughty sausage. Junior Reed provides some fucking wonderful haunting vocals to a couple of tracks. His powerful and soulful voice contrasts with the RZA's cranky music to astonishing effect. Finest of all must be 'I Can't Go To Sleep' which lures the mighty Isaac Hayes away from retailing confections named 'fudge 'ems', 'go fudge yo'self' and 'I fudged yo mama' on *South Park*. This track is a powerful reminder of what a world-class voice he still has. There's no words for 'I Can't Go To Sleep', it's on a Sistine Chapel level of inspired genius. Busta Rhymes turns up as well, although that probably goes without saying.



standing in comparison to KRS ONE or Ras Kass are rendered irrelevant. What they lack in technicality, they compensate for with brutal wit and inventive use of deliberate mistakes, conceptual pauses, and sound effects.

Recent ICP releases included a game-show format track, and a vast gothic epic closing the album. Here we get 'Radio Stars', where the juggaloes alternately rip the piss out of R&B, crunk and frat-rock - the crunk track is better than anything by Ja Rule or most people who do it for real. 'Crystal Ball', the slow portentous gothic cathedral number is positively sublime. It chills the blood and does hairs-on-er-neck stuff with a conviction that remains undiminished by the toilet humour elsewhere. When Violent J sings 'Imma make it into Shangri La', he exudes Michael Gira levels of devout conviction. That they can induce everything from a belly laugh to a shudder to contemplative solemnity in the space of an album, without coming over as either schizophrenic or hopelessly contrived, marks ICP out as pretty damn special. Time y'all appreciated this fact and showed a bit of clown love, fart-knocker.

Mastamind

Themindzi

GOTHOM OVERCORE / TVT RECORDS TVT2090 2 CD (2000)

And here's one of the folks who began all this stuff. This is the pure uncut seam of ore from which other Motown nasties mined their inspiration. Mastamind is somewhat less prone to the theatrical conceits of his spiritual offspring. The demons and devils, the chainsaw movie soundtracks, the filth and the grime are largely symbolic because life sometimes feels that way. Musically it's very clean but in the manner of moonlight glinting off a switchblade, rather than over-produced. The uncharacteristically lovely 'Worship The Wicket' could've come straight off an old Severed Heads record. Occasional forays into grunge-metal territory effective and come as such a contrast, tonally speaking, to the production as a whole, as to make Nine Inch Nails sound like The Beautiful South.

Lyrical, the cover's boast of Mastamind listing as one of *Murder Dog's* 119 most underrated rappers, might raise a chuckle, but flicking through that particular issue of my current bible, I notice that the other names pertain to folks whose skills are far in excess of the popularity you'd think they deserve. Mastamind is in good company. His flows are tight, you might say. Backpackers and types who don't really have love for hip-hop might turn their noses up at the topics and themes expressed, ignoring the skill involved and the fact that rap is as much about what you say as it is about how well you say it. *Themindzi* rocks like a bar steward. The guest spot on *Sesame Street* is going to be a long

time coming but these NATAS boys are one-off originals. Bag this disc.

All Saints

Saints And Sinners

LONDON RECORDS 8573 85295 5 (2000) CD

All Saints were virtually the only R&B act left not doing the shakey-shoulders dance to ripped off Timbaland beats, and one of the few still worth listening to. Shaznay Lewis being a hip-hop kid to the core, this has always been a conspicuous element in All Saints music, in an obvious rhythmic way, and in the eclectic scope of her songs. There's a strong hint of wistful sixties pop running throughout the songs, scratched, sampled and tweaked into a refreshing state of vitality that eludes most of those hairy student bloke bands. Add to this the odd bit of acoustic classicism, string quartet, a few breakbeats, and some seriously startling studio jiggery-pokery and you're left with the bewildering fact that this chart topping girlie band actually sounds about ten years ahead of all the crappy serious-guy music. They even do a cracking big beat number! Big beat for fuck's sake! That Fat Boy Slim / Chemical Brothers rubbish! Apart from the superb singles, 'Pure Shores' and 'All Hooked Up', the stand out atom bomb of a song must be the title track which sounds like someone's either been checking out, if not that Memphis shit, then certainly Bone Thugs N Harmony. Absolutely blinding! And their voices are like warm chocolate dripping down your spine and into your pants, but of course you already knew that.

Limp Bizkit

Chocolate Starfish And The Hot Dog Flavoured Water

FLIP / INTERSCOPE 490 793-2 CD (2000)

Limp Bizkit have received plenty mentions in the hip-hop press of late, to remind us that the Bizkit aren't hip-hop. I didn't realise it wasn't obvious, but then maybe that's America for you. When they go full-on into hip-hop territory, as they do twice here, it isn't great. 'Getcha Groove On' is probably the worst thing I've heard Xzibit guest on. The Swizz Beats version of 'Rollin'', where Fred stands alongside DMX and Method Man is better, but just begs the question, why didn't they have the courage to get Xzibit or DMX rapping on one of their regular metal tracks? Embarrassment perhaps? Rap-metal does seem to come in for a lot of flak, although I notice everyone was strangely polite and respectful when the musically formidable (and extremely dangerous) Boo-Yaa T.R.I.B.E. broke out the six strings and Led Zep riffs for *Angry Samoans*. Limp Bizkit's fusion of genres didn't work on that crappy Tom Cruise film theme, or *Three Dollar Bill Y'All*. However, it's all come together in spectacular fashion on this peculiarly monikered album. Whether doing the overdriven Led Zep-isms or the haunted quiet guitar effect bits, it stays tight, springy, and funky. Fred Durst's half-sung rapping flows effortlessly with the music sounding like some strange hybrid of DMX and that bloke from Jane's Addiction. The high res. production lends everything an almost super-real clarity - that sunlight through the cathedral window effect. I'm guessing the influence of their own DJ Lethal (formerly of House Of Pain) is significant in producing such an adventurous and forward-looking sound. All of which rather overlooks the fact that these are truly great songs. If anyone out there is planning to punch the boss at some point soon, 'Full Nelson' is as fine a bag of adrenaline-soaked bad attitude as you'd find on any Rollins disc.

Detroit Sickness

Insane Clown Posse

Bizaar

PSYCHOPATHIC / ISLAND DEF JAM 314 548 174-2 CD (2000)

Insane Clown Posse

Bizzar

PSYCHOPATHIC / ISLAND DEF JAM 314 548 175-2 CD (2000)

'The wicked shit', or acid rap is basically hip-hop that watches too many cheap horror films, and can be immobilised by hysterics upon finding a name like Buttworth in the phone book, and has been growing in the dark heart of Detroit for ten years. It started with Esham, TNT, and Mastamind of the group NATAS (Nation Ahead of Time and Space) and has just been getting bigger and worse ever since. There's Halfbreed, Toxxic, Bedlam, Psycosick, Hysteria, Simken Heights, and others due to burst out of the woodwork in an explosion of blood and custard. Whether they'll admit it or not, Eminem and his D12 sidekick Bizzarre definitely have Esham influences. Why else would their new D12 joint be advertised as containing the 'sickest lyrics ever'. Blaze, ICP and Twiztid are equally wrapped up in all this messy business. Just watch for Dark Lotus, the wicked shit super-group featuring Esham and ICP coming soon. Yet, every time I see an ICP reference it's always along the lines of how they aren't hip-hop and they can't rap. Bullshit. True, their attempts to freestyle are just about the worst I've ever heard, but then Dr. Dre and Eazy E never even wrote their own lines. *Murder Dog* magazine, Three 6 Mafia, and Chuck D (yep. Public Enemy Chuck D!) all show love for the wicked clowns, which are as high endorsements as you can get.

Two simultaneously released albums with almost identical names and covers. Marketing exercise? Who cares - this is their best stuff ever. The music is excellent, hard beaty stuff throughout. Sure, there's loud guitars on one or two tracks, but this minimal quotient of fat-ass rock hardly makes them a rap-metal concern. The lyrics are just so fucking out the window, it's hard to believe folks can listen to this without laughing until their shirts turn red. The Eminem beef rages on with 'Please Don't Hate Me', a moving countrified confessional where Shaggy admits to repeated and perverted sex with Slim Shady's mother: 'Your Mom's ass looks like oatmeal - Yo! / It's bumpy and grainy, but I like the feel though' - I get the impression that ICP aren't really that fussed by what Eminem might think of them. Observations about ICP's poor lyrical

HERE'S BUT ONE STEP FURTHER into the bizarre universe of 'The Unholy Three', a place which I've been intrigued by ever since I was sent a map in the form of the interview by Jim Haynes last issue. (Seems every fanzine going has published a Reynolds interview lately, but that's inevitable given their fluent gift for inspired surrealist babble). Within moments of receiving and reading that interview, I clicked on and found a photograph of Reynolds which I immediately saved, printed out and re-drew for the mag. True, there was a deadline to meet - but there was also a strange compulsion that I could not ignore, a feeling I hadda get down onto paper, and soon.

'It would be nice to hear some of this stuff,' I mused to myself in a corner of my brain, thinking no-one was listening. Since then my wishes have been granted with much generosity from the Freedom From label in America, and Reynolds themselves, who got in touch by e-mail and sent me lots of releases. And some of their great drawings for this issue. I'm now surrounded by more images of the band than I can

handle, but mostly by images of Miguel Tomasin, the band's drummer and singer, who has Down's Syndrome. On the *Barbatroulos* LP, there's even a pin-up image of Miguel wearing his fine black suit. The Reynolds method is to collage photocopied images of his visage onto anything and everything - maps, photographs, texts, chickens, and the bodies of other people. Have you ever seen the Robert Crumb cartoon strip, where Mr Natural is pestered by an exasperating, clean-cut kid with an inane grin on his face? No matter what he does, Mr Natural can't get rid of the supernatural kid, who refuses to vanish or even die when pushed over a cliff. 'Who are you?' he admits in defeat at last. 'I'm God...' is the reply.

I heartily recommend all of the records below, but you should be warned that the incredibly raw, primitive style of Reynolds music is not for all listeners. Some may find it tedious - others simply hilarious. As to what I find, read on... (EP)

Reynols

Polos Mosco

USA POLYAMORY / FREEDOM FROM
NO NUMBER CD (ND)

I don't think I've heard a single English word in the recorded works of Argentinian band Reynolds, the moaning wail of psychic visionary Miguel Tomasin spilling out of the speakers as he emits his holy-fool utterances in a sacred trance. Yet the communication feels like it has rarely been clearer. Maybe it functions on a more unknowable level; unless, like the cynic, you think we can read whatever meaning we wish into these unintelligible rants.

This record, a joint issue by two American former cassette labels, is an effects-drenched episode - not a second goes by without the fuzz pedals, distortion swathes, or echo-

chambers doing their reverberating thing and boosting the signals of guitars, drums and voice to a manic degree. Normally, this method signals the last refuge of wannabe musos hiding their lack of ability behind a wall of studio deceit and trickery. Reynolds have nothing to prove in that area. Their very ineptness hangs off them like a beggar's rags, and they are proud of it - wearing that badge like a medal. They use the studio effects like toys, children let loose in a sweetshop of sound. Half Japanese dreamed they would be some kind of ultimate in a band who couldn't play; 'we don't even have to practice,' boasted singer Jad Fair in his heyday, 'it's a gift!' Well, Jad, you've met your match.

This is *the* most rock-and-roll record. It's taking the template of Bo Diddley, Jerry Lee Lewis and Chuck Berry and rolls them into one, dousing the spirits of those pioneer

musicians with secret Latin-American magic spells and releasing them transformed into Gila monsters, butterflies and poisonous snakes. It's all about excess of volume, excess of ideas, exceeding good taste and wallowing in that excess with a natural, animalistic glee.

Early signs are looking good for Reynolds. If Miguel Tomasin continues to deliver on emanating his 'psychic fzzz' to this unearthly degree, I may have to cave in and admit he really is some second incarnation of the Infant Jesus, or like that. No doubt, his angelic visions are assisted by the estimable guitarist-noisemaking team of Robeto Conzalo and Anla Courtis. They are adepts at realising, in carnal form, the other-worldly energies of this magic man. I suppose I can see how some wimps would be repelled by the unrelenting howl of this record, its utterly anti-social incoherence. They must

GLOSSOLALIA

The Surreal HolyDogRoller Evangelism of

REYNOLS



The Sound 9projector Ninth Issue 2001

either learn to adapt, or look elsewhere for salvation. The rest of you, stop preening that stuffed Jad Fair dolly and come over to this neck of the playpen for some real fun!

ED PINSENT

Reynols

Minecxio

USA FREEDOM FROM NO
NUMBER VINYL EP (ND)

In some ways the most baffling of the Reynols product on offer here. It's a seven track 'sampler' of musical performances, rehearsals, live fragments and answerphone messages, most of which are quite short and stitched together in a bewildering sequence. Only those truly attuned to the mental processes of Tomasín can divine what is going on. This EP is almost like an advert for Reynols, assembled along the lines of a spoof movie trailer; in fact, it even has a sample of banal TV music midway through. Of course, unlike a conventional advert, *Minecxio* will have the opposite effect and kill sales instead of generate them. Come to that, it will probably kill its listeners too. If the dirge-like moaning of the last (long) track doesn't finish you off - AHOO, OUHOOO, OOUH moans Tomasín, letting his voice off the leash to retrieve the perfect note - then tune in to the glorious buzz-saw roaring guitar of 'Minecxio Cachubo'. If you can abide this for 90 seconds, then I guess you've won your spurs as a Reynols fan. Another gem.

ED PINSENT

Reynols

10,000 Chickens'

Symphony

GERMANY DRONE RECORDS DR-42
VINYL EP (1999)

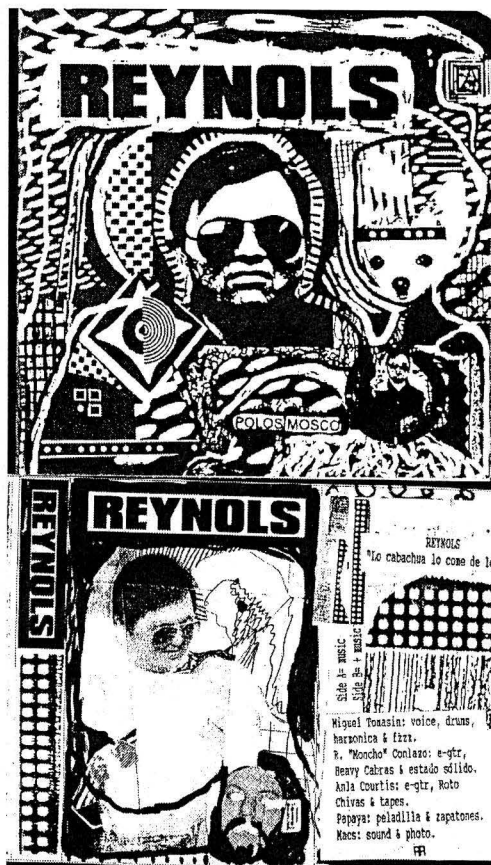
A marbled-colour vinyl EP, this is a highly charged and talismanic object, with magic symbols on its labels. Allegedly constructed from the processed sounds of a chicken-coop in Argentina, and I can well believe it; this absurd project was commissioned on another inspired whim of Miguel's. Quieter than the usual Reynols guitar-percussion explosion, because they don't play on it. On the A-side, a doomy quiet drone leaks out like chemical warfare, with the odd isolated chirp of a chicken leaking into the mix from an unidentifiable location. Chilling: a picture of chickens in hell, shackled in the inescapable battery farm system, fed on their own reprocessed guano.

The B-side delivers the chirping chicken concerto we expect; it starts out wild, and gets wilder, as the layers of recordings are overdubbed into an impenetrable noise. If the coop contained 625 chickens to begin with, then I calculate that only four overdubs would suffice to bring the total up to the required sum. If played loud (as it should be), this is a nightmarish chatter, scarier than Alfred Hitchcock; birds become alien beasts,

domestic wildfowl are transformed into Lovecraftian monsters. Through his alchemy, Miguel can apparently change the world around him until we too experience it as he does - or how he wants us to see it.

ED PINSENT

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Reynols

Barbatroulos

USA FREEDOM FROM NO NUMBER
VINYL LP (1999?)

One of the stranger and somehow more subdued records from the Reynols laboratory of concoctions, which isn't to say it's lacking in the fiery power of their usual work. This collection of songs and instrumentals might be the most 'produced' they have realised, with a range of oddball studio techniques. One technique is to maximise distortion on one track, allowing the energy of the performance to shine through despite the obstacles they lay in its path. In this way they become like the ultimate Pebbles garage band; this was a trick Half-Japanese used to some extent, also. Contrived as heck, but so what?

Among the more traditional Reynols workouts - such as drumming and ranting, answerphone message samples, and Miguel yelping inside an echo chamber - are some beautifully strange stand-out pieces. There's a very abstract amplifier drone piece; another track, featuring a forlorn harmonica apparently trying to do battle with a tornado blast made out of slow guitar noise. There's

a Harry Partch soundalike moment, where the detuned and junky guitars accompany a Miguel free-form text of dark and formless thoughts. The trancey piece at the end of 'Side Bolomo' is likewise restrained, a strange blend of droning guitars and voice which achieves eerie resonating harmonies, steeped in an unearthly beauty.

The sleeve reveals a curious naming strategy for this release. 'There are no titles because they went to buy osobuco to feed our "chihuahua" dog', which I guess is the Reynols equivalent of saying a dog ate their homework. I like the idea that the titles for music like this might have some value as currency, and that furthermore this value must be sacrificed for the sake of the group's pet dog. It suggests how every commodity from our 'normal' world can be converted into a new energy to fuel the Reynols universe. Common sense is the first thing to be sucked into this black hole of absurdity.

ED PINSENT

Reynols

Lo cabachua lo come de lo conejo

USA SPITE 59 CASSETTE

Another utterly charming piece of dementia. This tape comprises two side-long 'suites', which are largely an excuse for Miguel to rant and rave his texts over a relentless backdrop of feedback, noise, loud guitars, and occasional drumming. This sounds like imminent aesthetic disaster, but grows into one of those compelling noise-episodes that demands to be heard start-to-finish. The first side builds up swiftly to a point where you would swear you're hearing a recording of the end of the world -

bombs falling, sirens wailing, explosions, and piteous cries of humans in distress. Except that the siren turns out to be Miguel, having fun and making funny amplified noises. His voice is so steeped in reverberation here that he might as well *live* in the echo chamber. There's a *Mad Magazine* spoof exposé of early rock stars, which sends up recording studio techniques of the 1950s. The kid pop star is so weak at singing they put him inside an echo chamber to boost his voice. But he's not whispering his lyrics - he's merely *thinking* them! 'This echo chamber will pick up *anything*!', boasts the smug producer. In the same way, Miguel Tomasín has a direct link from his brain to his art - the echo chamber enables him to directly unleash his thoughts on the unsuspecting world. Side two of the tape is even more distorted, but no less compelling; it ends with a long excruciating attempt at the song form, which Reynols deliver in their typical insufferable form: inane formless wails soaring on top of inane formless guitar strums. Repeat until fade...another LP in the can, lads.

ED PINSENT

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USA

Courtis

Eating an Estufa

USA FREEDOM FROM TAPE

This is a 1998 tape effort from Anla Courtis, one half of the 'brains' behind the Reynols operation. It comprises a few basic roaring noises in the industrial machinery mode - intensive whines and howls, generated through electric guitar feedback and processing. And at least one piece where he seriously maltreats a mini-moog; it's surprising the Vice Squad didn't run him in. Standard noisy fare you might assume, and perhaps you'd be right - although (like all loud volume music) this stuff follows the same commitment to dementia as the Reynols project, in that it sends you to a place where rational thought is no longer possible, thus leaving you wide open to further insane suggestions. With an automatic 'scrawl' artwork on the cover.

ED PINSENT

Miguel Tomasín

Interview with Himself

USA FREEDOM FROM TAPE

Played this one in the tub the other night. Became just about the strangest bath I've ever taken, and that's saying something, because I've had some *pretty* strange



washing episodes in my lifetime. It's an all-voice tape, natcho, short episodes of Miguel either talking or laughing to himself, or simply making silly noises in an endearing childlike way. Sometimes these are made into cunning overlapping loops, so I would gauge from the repeated sounds and phrases that crop up now and again. Sometimes, liberties are taken by adding a dollop of echo which adds an extra layer of peculi-horrible flavour to the deal. Again, although there isn't a single recognisable English word, y'

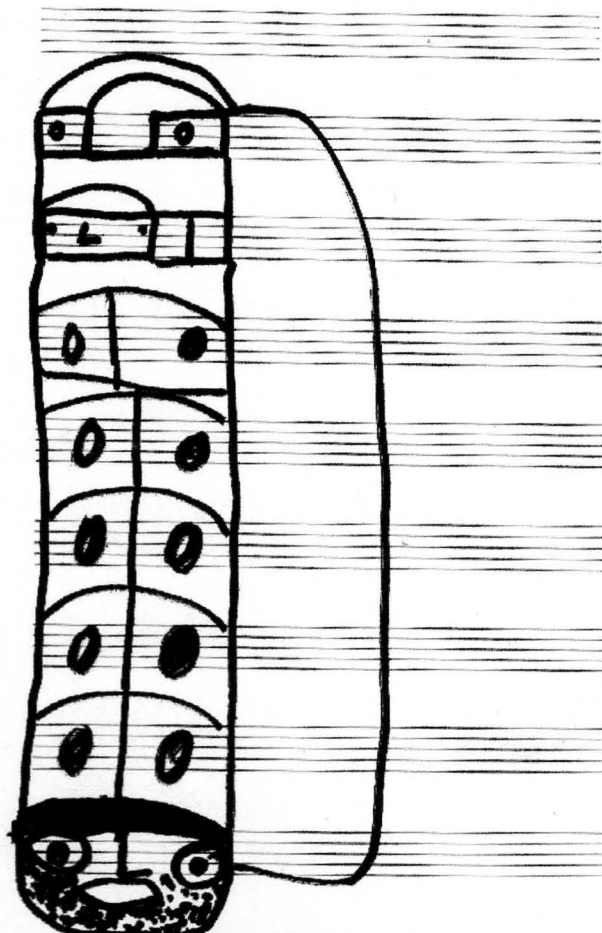
can't shake off this nagging feeling that this talking-in-tongues styled gibberish is speaking directly to the heart, and only a fool could deny its meaning. In the same way that the image of Miguel is repeated obsessively on Reynols artworks, I was focussing on the soapsuds in my bath and wondering if they might drift into a recognisable pattern. At this point, I decided to emerge from the waters and swiftly slip into my towelled bathrobe, before I went completely nutso. If you're seriously 'into' the cult of Tomasín and Reynols, this is pretty much another essential addition to your 'shrine'.

ED PINSENT

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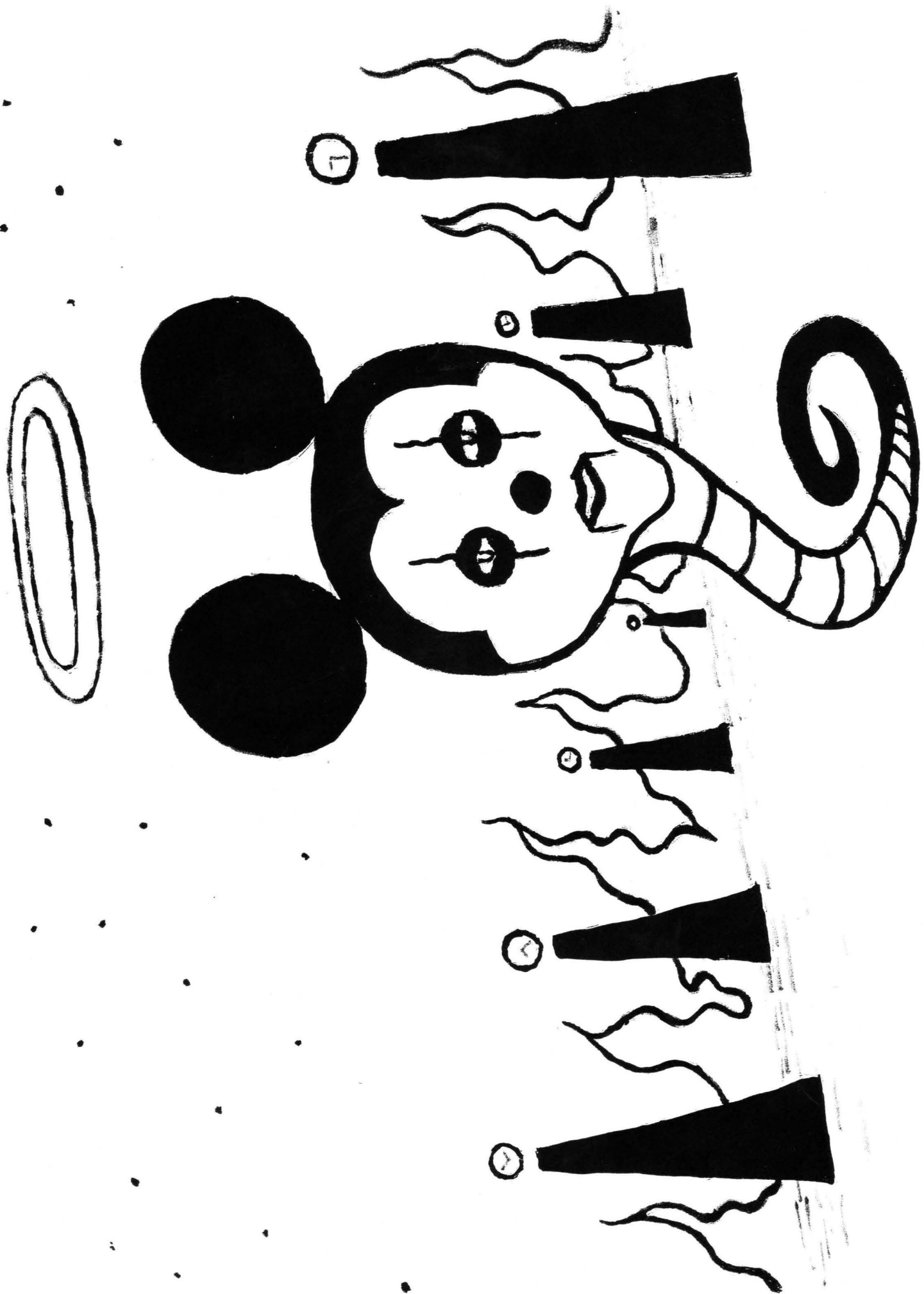
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Various Artists

Sound Drifting: I Silenzi Parlano Tra Loro

AUSTRIA TRITON / ORF
KUNSTRADIO ISBN 3-85486-082-X
2 x CD + BOOK (2000)

Here's an impressive document of a gigantic 'interactive' art event, of which this package - a double CD-set bound into the pages of a flimsy paperback book, with dust wrapper and full colour pictures, yet - probably amounts to little more than a souvenir, or talisman.

Thankfully, the sounds and music hereon speak for themselves and represent highly accomplished sound-

art events. Granted, if I give you a list of some of the environmental sounds, it'll come across like a ready-made shopping list of musique concrète sources; running water, traffic, news reports, heavy machinery drones, airport lounges, computer voices, television samples, crowds of anonymous people, children playing...any of this seem a tad familiar? Well, check your reservations in at the door, and be prepared for a goodly listening experience. The treatments and textures, the abrupt editing, the sheer volume and range of ideas and sources on display here amount to a feast, almost too much to cope with. For those of us with gargantuan sonic appetites, this is like manna from Kensington High Street. *Sonic Drifting* is a sprawl, an international disembodied journey through five dimensions, an itinerant monster gathering vast chunks of information and massive dollops of sonic data, using its hands like the mechanical scoops of road-diggers, and shovelling it into your ears with all the grace of a slapstick pie fight.

The second CD is a one-track, hour-long remix of the first one, nimbly executed by THE SOUNDRIFFER. This is not an alias for another silly DJ, but the name of a generative computer system that eats up soundfiles, and vomits them back as remixed-stew. The software for this was designed by Winfried Ritsch. It's OK as far as it goes, but where the original pieces make the modern urban experience into something dark and stranger than it already is, the remix version removes that element of menace; it puts the sounds back onto a safer footing, and might even sap from the vitality of *Sound Drifting's* everywhere-at-once presence, that chaotic sense that suggests nobody in the world knows what's going on.

And I'm one of them!...I don't purport to understand one iota of the organisational 'plan' behind *Sound Drifting*. It's described as 'An interdependent, temporary system of international remote sub-projects using a wide range of methods and approaches to the generation and processing of sounds and images to form a continuous on line - on site - on air sound installation'. *Ptooeey!* I can grasp that it was an international event to do with the Ars Electronica Prize for 1999, and that over 50 artists were involved - which is why you won't get a namecheck for a single one in this review, bubba. This is one of the dangers associated with such large-scale, Committee-driven notions; individual creative personalities can get swamped in the logistics, the planning, the financing. Each participant had quite wildly varying ideas about what they were going to record, and how they would present it - and they back it up with well-nigh impenetrable, pretentious remarks and comments, and pointless anecdotes of no interest to anyone but themselves. Although I can glimpse moments where there are genuine attempts to be impressed by the terror and strangeness of the world, and to communicate this to listeners so that we may see the world anew, I find the commentaries largely indigestible. Likewise, I raise an eyebrow at the way in which all these diverse activities were brought together - involving gigantic exhibition spaces, video links, audio links, and - inevitably - the fucking world-wide web, so that the ideas could flourish in 'virtual' space. I'm still not clear from any of this where the art actually was, nor how the audience arrived (from where, and to where?) to experience it - if they did. This is one of the problems with art on the Internet for me (says the man with an ever-expanding Sound Projector website!) - I have to challenge the universal assumption that it's automatically opening new channels of communication. Just because the art's on there, it doesn't mean that the world and his brother are logging on to it, let alone even engaging with the ideas.

But this might be a tiny quibble when we're rewarded with such a fine package of complex and challenging sounds from these exciting and otherwise largely unheralded environmental concept artists. Some of whom could, it seems from this evidence, teach your average electronics dumbo a thing or two about how to organise their ideas. By that I mean I like the boldness of *Sound*

In the ART GALLERY

Performance-Action

Modern Composition

Dying Donkeys

Drifting, the emphatic way that each new 'episode' or 'project' is stated, with deliberation and economy. None of it seems tentative, even at the expense of appearing to be pretentious.

ED PINSENT

Distributed by MEGO
www.mdos.at

Leif Elggren / souRce research / Matmos Project

98_1 RGB [an audio spectrum]

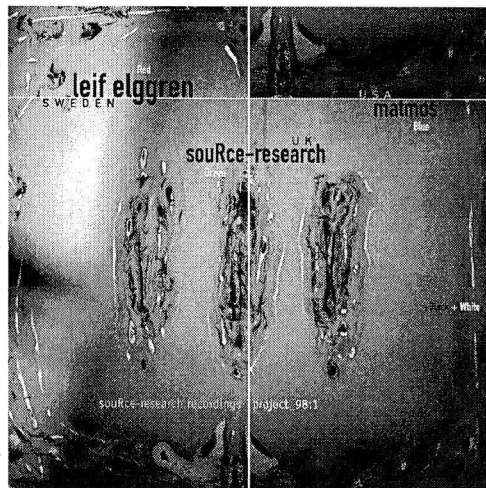
UNITED KINGDOM SIRCOM SR 98:1CD CD (1998)

An unusual conceptual item, and highly intriguing...it comes over more like scientific research than music, but research into what? As you know, due to the physical qualities of light, only a small range of colours are available to the human eye.

Presumably there are a lot more colours out there in the ultra-violet range, which we can't perceive. I've always been horrified by this idea (despite doing this mag in black and white. I have been a great user of wild colours in my artworks) and I can't accept the idea that, for example, a red telephone has no colour at all when the light isn't shining on it; isn't it 'inherently' red in some way?

This record, an 'audio spectrum', is predicated on a similar thesis and might even extend it from the realm of the visual to the acoustic, to 'inaudible' sub-sonic and ultra-sonic sounds. Each sound artist was commissioned to produce work which would convey what they thought a

certain colour would sound like. Leif's chosen colour is red, while the Americans (current Matador superstars) Matmos adopt the blue range and leave green to the mysterious source-research fellows of Glasgow. There are accordingly three interchangeable coloured sleeves which you can slip in and out of the jewel case according to your personal bias. In between, you get anecdotal information about colour blindness and synaesthesia, and a speculation on the subjectiveness of this whole area, why some people feel that



The Sound 9projector Ninth Issue 2001

certain sounds, numbers, or otherwise intangible things are associated very strongly with particular colours. And how it is virtually impossible to communicate something so subjective.

Well, that impossibility hasn't prevented these sound artists from having a bash at it. The three dominant tracks are sandwiched between two tracks called 'Black' and 'White', collaborations between the three sound-artists; appropriately for starting at the black end of the spectrum, we get at least 3-4 minutes of 'invisible' sound (ie silence) before fragments of sound collage start to fade in and disappear, like light reflected briefly from a prism. We move onto the 'main' suite: Leif's 'red' track kicks in, using 'neon gas pulsating in an electric field' as the sound source - it's a gorgeous rich and pungent electronic drone, whose variations are caused by the frequencies generated by a nearby human body. For 'green', Source Research take a guitar improvisation track by Dominic Forde and put it next to Ian Mackinnon's library of source recordings. A queasy dreamscape emerges, gradually growing more sinister. It's good to feel the green green grass of Ohms.

ED PINSENT

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David Rosenbloom

Invisible Gold

USA POGUS PRODUCTIONS P21022-2 CD
(2000)

Rosenbloom is an American researcher and composer who since the 1960s has been recognised as a pioneer and important figure in the world of experimental avant-garde music. Currently residing in California where he teaches, he has an impressive CV of achievements in experimental work, as it resides within the academic system over there - residencies, courses, publications, a website, and a shower of international prizes. This CD is quite an achievement. By using bio-feedback technology, Rosenbloom has developed systems and equipment which can convert electrical energy from the human brain into musical sounds.

Michael Prime, the eccentric UK composer and experimenter, has done similar things using plants and vegetables. Now here's a record which boasts 'extended musical interface with the human nervous system', and delivers.

As Rosenbloom sees it, his processes and experiments are redolent with mystical, psychological, historical and alchemical depths, and possibilities for the future which he explains at some length and in some detail. He's interested in the patterns of energy flow which he can harness, how he translate thought processes into music, and the wider implications of how thoughts can flow directly into any art. From this point, he speculates wildly about the universality of all artistic endeavour, the connectedness of the universe, and the *prima materia* of the Alchemists, the single universal element from which the elixir of life might be derived.

These reflections have clearly fed into the 1972 experiment, entitled 'Portable Gold and Philosophers' Stones', which was realised with four performers. The advanced technology used for this was considerable; bio-feedback devices would simultaneously monitor the brainwaves of each performer, and amplify them through resonant filters (a device which Rosenbloom calls The Holophone). Four-note musical chords, made out of pulse waves, were already built into the set-up, so the players had only to 'think' in order to produce sounds instantly. It drones wonderfully for 18 minutes. The composer notes from this work how calm alertness produces a more pleasing musical chord; as the brain activity increases, a series of mixed chords (still poignant, but more discordant) resulted. That's a gem of an understatement.

The CD continues with two more long pieces, two parts of 'On Being Invisible'. A far more complex and dynamic environment was used, which I don't even pretend to understand. The performer was wired up to several pieces of equipment, including a mechanism which could generate a musical sound structure, responding exactly to the thoughts and mental processes of the human. Another machine would control the overall output and, I suppose, ensure that it wasn't merely a random-generative experiment. The performer had a certain amount of power to initiate events. Shifts or lapses in attention, or changes in direction of thought, would affect the music directly. Where the first piece drones pleasantly, 'On Being Invisible' is filled with insane, restless twittering, and bizarre sound events which more accurately resembles the

dynamics of the thought process.

Invisible Gold is unique, and a great listen, although somehow I felt it could have done with a little editing. Not every second of it is successful as music, but I suppose that to eliminate the irrelevant passages would somehow compromise the integrity of the experiment. But that's niggardly criticism. The second part of 'On Being Invisible' in particular is remarkable, and amply demonstrates the 'visible miracles' that Rosenbloom enthuses over. While the droning harmonics of the first track might just be playable by four clever keyboardists, the indescribable events and wild dynamics of the remainder could *never* be realised in any other way. This is a form of cyborg experimentation, similar to what high-profile Australian artist Stelarc does using his body, turning himself into a virtual computer-operated robot. I like Rosenbloom's idea of 'mind-music', which although extremely technical and cerebral, delivers very visceral results - and conjures up images of performers quite at odds with those of conventional musicians playing on stage!

Rosenbloom thinks he's onto something important about our relationship to music, the universality of it, and untapped potentials within the human mind; he might be on the way to realising other ways of developing musical processes.

ED PINSENT

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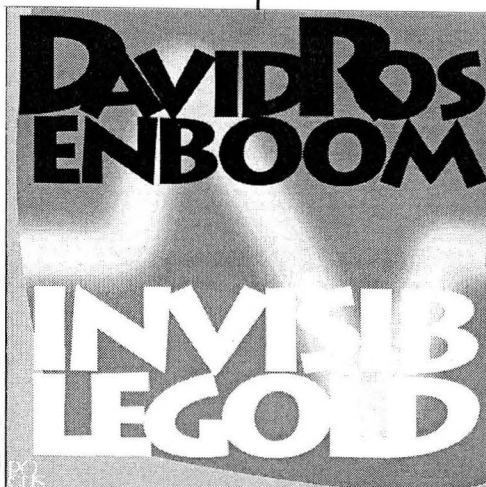
gal
Defragmentation /
Blue
GERMANY PLATE LUNCH
PL11 CD (2000)

Defragmentation/Blue is a conceptual piece by a German sound artist who goes under the ridiculous lower-case name of 'gal'. It was originally designed to accompany a light installation by the Japanese architect Yumi Kori. In the useful sleeve notes, Kori explains how the piece evolved in response to her spending five weeks in a hospital watching a close relative dying. The modern hospital is a place of artifice and routine, where natural rhythms are substituted by new temporal experiences like the serving of meals and daily medical check-ups. Kori was severely disorientated by the experience: 'after some weeks it turned out to be impossible to tell how much time had passed and even whether time had passed at all'. The installation, together with Gal's music, was designed to replicate this phenomenon of 'defragmented time'.

The booklet has a couple of photographs of the installation, which was held in New York in 1999 - a crepuscular affair of the kind most often associated with the American artist James Turrell. I'm a big fan of Turrell's work, and this looks to have been an excellent piece in similar vein: fine shards of light faintly illuminating a carpeted chamber suffused in the deepest blue.

Although designed for the express purpose of soundtracking the installation, Gal's music nevertheless retains its impact when listened to as a piece of work in its own right. It's indexed into five tracks, but is really one continuous piece: a very long and slow unfolding of liquid frequencies and low rumbles. Soft, intermittent bleeps evoke the deathly pulse of the life support machine, while occasional intakes of breath conjure a distinctly Beckettian mood.

Confronted by such a stark piece of conceptualisation, there really is nothing for the listener to do but surrender to its embrace. Listening to this music, time ceases to function as a



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linear sequence of events and is reconfigured as an endless, painful present, always on the brink of slipping into nothingness but never quite relinquishing its grip.

RICHARD REES JONES

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Kymatik

Dar-As-Sulh Vol 1

UNITED KINGDOM PARADIGM PD 15 CD (2001)

Cymatics relates to a field of physical research associated with the work of Dr Hans Jenny and Peter Manners. Jenny, the Swiss physicist (to whom this CD is dedicated), used the term to describe what he observed when amplified sound tones could make patterns in fluids, or powders. These same observations have fed into the work of other sound artists, such as Disinformation and more obviously ECM 323. Kymatik, the London-based sound artist, claims to have been researching the area of psycho-acoustics for over ten years. Hence he offers us his 23 minute 'Lorenz Attractor' work, a remarkable series of complex tones that create a blissful, ringing drone as they seep out of the speakers. Hans Jenny applied his research to start using complex tones for therapy and healing; Kymatik is clearly aware of that end of the research, explaining that he is trying to create a 'haven from subliminal information', a personal environment where nothing can distract or disturb you. He intends to dedicate his next CD to further exploration of this healing project. One's reminded of La Monte Young, who allegedly lives with a continuous tone playing in his Dream House in New York. 'I would imagine that he has discovered a sympathetic tone that energises him in some way', ECM 323 told this magazine in 1999. Kymatik generates the same sort of benevolent psychic energy; it works, but maybe it needs to be longer than 23 minutes!

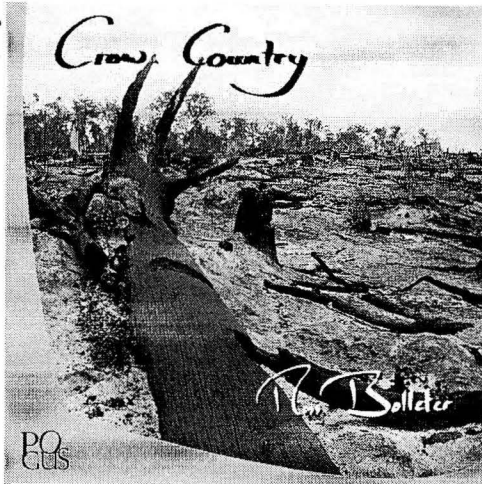
This is but one track on this rich and diverse sampler of Kymatik's talents, a man otherwise unknown but for an appearance on the first *Variations* comp and a limited release on his own nONSERVIAM! label. He uses electronics and collage techniques with imagination and skill, and is a serious devotee of high-tech methods, if his preamble on AmbiSonics and his circle of audio hardware associates is anything to go by. Some tracks utilise UHJ encoding and thus enable AmbiSonic playback, but these won't work at home unless you have a decoder. Shame. 'Dentists For Mice' remains a particularly strong work however, a high-density collage composed of loops, textures and heavily treated voice samples. It's urgent, clear and dynamic - very exciting. This was made using scraps from his own unfinished works, and 'media edits' (meaning voices from the TV, I assume), and is streets ahead of most contemporary electronica.

Kymatik is also well-informed about fine art and gallery installations, and is drawn to the point where art crosses over into physics and scientific research. These interests seem to converge to some degree on his 'Excerpt from Kandinsky's Im Blau', an unusual experiment which manages to translate a painting by this Bauhaus master into music. The *audio spectrum* CD (see above) likewise converts RGB values from the light-spectrum into sound; Kymatik comes up with a fine electronic drone. Less high-minded perhaps is



the 'Tisedni' track, derived from a home recording of a spin dryer. This is fun, but it degenerates swiftly into a kind of muddy minimal dance music, a pitfall that awaits any composer who leans too heavily on the digital delay.

All the long works on this sampler are linked by brief field and nature recordings, showing Kymatik also wishes to dabble in an area mapped out by



Chris Watson. In all a fine showcase from a gifted creator with many strings to his bow.

ED PINSENT

paradigm@stalk.net

Ross Bolleter

Crow Country

USA POGUS
PRODUCTIONS
P21021-2 CD (2000)

An outstanding collection of five compositions by this one-of-a-kind Australian musician / composer, the likes of which I can

guarantee you won't have heard afore. His first piece 'Unfinished Business' is performed on a ruined piano which the artist found in a tractor shed at Nallan Sheep Station. This instrument was so decrepit it was literally falling apart as he tried to play the piece; in this semi-documentary recording from 1987, you also hear the sounds of bewildered children and a little of the outdoor ambience of this remote setting. Besides the local sheep-farming family, ants crawling on the piano frame were his only audience. (At night, cicadas applauded him). The forlorn music, struggling to emerge from the reluctant frame of the old piano, will fill you with as much unnameable sorrow as the bleakness of the locale. And that's just for openers!

'That Time (Simulplay II)' is a piano and double-bass piece with a difference, in that the two musicians play simultaneously but can't hear each other. Ideally they should be located on opposite sides of a continent, while their intuitive semi-improvised performances are broadcast by radio into an audition space. The piece only 'happens' at the juncture of the two signals. The interest here lies not so much in the finished music (which is fairly routine discordancy), but in the concept of the work, which says something about absence and communication over a long distance. The radio sets are just as much 'performers' as the musicians; John Cage would probably approve.

'Under Rockwood' is a double-bass composition, a mournful elegy that incorporates personal tributes to his dead parents, while it struggles to fight off the crippling effects of melancholy. 'Piano Dreaming' is an answer piece to the first ruined piano work, recording a forgotten and rotting player-piano in similar circumstances. Bolleter seems fascinated with the nostalgic resonances he can extract from decay; the decay of the instrument, for him, seems to echo a decay in the culture of music and art, the way the 'unrequited loves of Schumann, Brahms and Chopin dry out and degrade into a heap of rotten wood and rusting wire'. Perhaps this is saying something about the decay of our own lives too; it certainly makes me sad to dwell on it for too long. Bolleter's ruined-piano freak-outs caused the sheep farmers to think a thunderstorm was imminent, and they quickly came to the conclusion he was a 'maniac piano thumping bastard'. I like the adventurous 'outback' spirit in which his work is situated, a rugged individualism which also transfers to his more conventional compositions. There's a lot of real humanity woven into this music, an understanding about the inescapable shackles of personal and shared histories, and Bolleter's work seems to owe a bigger debt to the remote alien landscapes of the Australian countryside and its wildlife than it does to academic conservatoire training.

ED PINSENT

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Cornelius Cardew and The Scratch Orchestra

The Great Learning

USA ORGAN OF CORTI CORTI 21 CD (2000)

Cornelius Cardew is perhaps not quite regarded as one of the 'big wheels' of the avant-garde, and it seems to be only through my knowing several admirers of his work that I'm aware of him at all. Opinions on his life and career seem to vary wildly between unrestrained enthusiasm and dismissive scepticism, particularly in the case of the latter, with regard to his more-overtly politicised output. From the little I know about this intriguing composer, several points seem to have remained consistently applicable throughout his life. Firstly, that he practised a constant vigilance against one common pitfall of working within the avant-garde, namely the tendency to replace the dogmatic clichés of traditional forms of expression with new clichés that in themselves become dogma by simple virtue of their divergence from that which they have replaced. In other words, whilst Cardew was critical of both Cage and Stockhausen (to name but two) he refused to spare his own body of work from the withering gaze of sceptical scrutiny. That is to say, he wasn't one for resting on laurels; he was driven to move ever forwards, and not just by volition as its own justification, but in order to improve upon, or redress errors which he perceived in his own earlier endeavours. Secondly, he was not afraid of failure. I'm informed that some later pieces, particularly those addressing class struggle as viewed from a Maoist perspective appear a little naive, or even quaint. Whether or not this is the case may not even be entirely relevant for it is clear that the dramatic twists and turns of his career were informed always by the highest of motives - to remain true to his own ideals; to produce inspirational music which balanced an uncompromising desire to innovate whilst eschewing the trappings of cultural elitism in which the avant-garde often finds itself enmeshed.

As it turns out, the considerations above, formulated independently within the limited scope of my own dumbo ignorance, are not too far off the mark, for, as Cardew himself wrote in the liner notes to the original vinyl pressing of *The Great Learning*: 'I read recently that one African tribe attributes the creation of the world to God's failure to hold everything together in one piece... Failure exists in relation to goals. Nature has no goals and so can't fail. Humans have goals, and so they have to fail. Often the wonderful configurations produced by failure reveal the pettiness of the goals. Of course we have to go on striving for success, otherwise we could not genuinely fail.' Or, it ain't what you do, it's the way that you do it. Perhaps reaching a destination is not so important as the manner in which the journey is undertaken. In a sense, it is the journey itself which is the point, it being the active and educational component of the endeavour. Which is better - the big mound of bangers and mash, or the clean plate which results?

This phenomenal work consists of seven lengthy parts (or paragraphs) each based upon a component of the first chapter of Confucius' *The Great Learning*. Cardew composed it largely in the form of graphic notation, or instructions, which were then interpreted by The Scratch Orchestra, comprising of forty or more people with quite different backgrounds and degrees of musical training. Thus, as I believe was the intention, the work itself becomes more important than the individual writer or performers. Due to the collaborative nature of the composition, the role of the prima-donna artist is lost in the chorus of divergent voices. With these pieces involving large numbers of people performing similar musical roles according to the interpretation of each individual, it is inevitable that there should be a certain chaotic quality. Cardew's intention was that the listener would in effect become a further compositional element as he or she unconsciously identifies patterns within the whole, thus further democratising the musical experience.

Fascinating stuff, but surely only so much theory? Well, possibly not. I remember being quite moved by Paragraph 7 of this work, which is entirely choral, sometime prior to becoming aware of the methodology behind it. Rarely, for something so apparently conceptual, the intentions seem to be communicable without needing to read the manifesto beforehand. Collected on this disc are twenty minute excerpts from Paragraphs 1, 2, and 7. Paragraph 1 is notable for its use of organ, various whistles, and large groups of players banging small stones together. The effect, particularly of the whistles and stones, seems to transport the piece almost entirely away from the context of

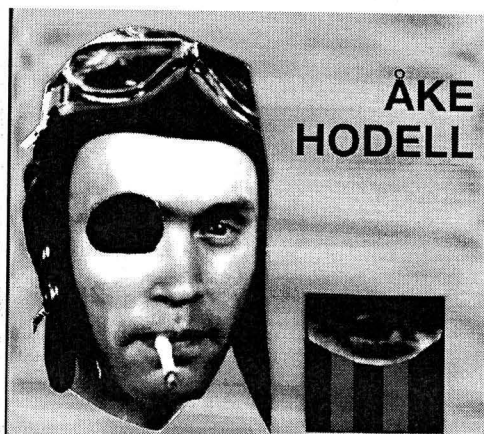
a classical recital, or even just something you stick on your stereo. For me, it possesses a strong sense of some unspecified geography, a characteristic it shares in common with Mexican artist Delfino Guevara who employs similar instrumentation in eulogising themes from his country's pre-Hispanic past. Although Cardew's piece doesn't actually suggest Mexico to me (surprisingly) it does hint at something quite primal in the sense of being fundamental to human experience, rather than merely unsophisticated. Music is said to be a universal language, and that maxim does seem to hold true here, irrespective of short spoken passages in English. Paragraph 2 is close to a cacophony of choral voices and largely arrhythmic percussion, the result of which is not unlike being caught in a torrential down-pouring of hailstones, having that same overpowering sense of urgency and panic. Paragraph 3 is entirely choral. Again, with each, the music, of which the listener's focus is very much a part, seems to exist entirely in its own space, separate from the gubbins of concert auditorium or CD player.

Unless it's my imagination, I get the impression that Cornelius Cardew is beginning to posthumously accrue the recognition which, on the strength of *The Great Learning* alone, he surely deserves. This is not so much a CD as an experience which changes the listener in much the same way as any truly great work - be it film, painting, or a well

communicated explanation of quantum theory - should do. The clue is of course in the title. The only frustrating thing is that Paragraphs 3 to 6 aren't here.

WAR ARROW

Cortical Foundation, 23852
Pacific Coast Highway # 419,
Malibu, California 90265, USA



Ake Hodell

Verbal Brainwash and other works

SWEDEN FYLKINGEN
RECORDS FYCD 1018-1-2-3
3 x CD (2000)

This triple CD collects Swedish sound-artist Hodell's

compositions recorded for the Swedish Broadcasting Corporation from 1963 to 1977. Some have noted that Nurse With Wound / Steve Stapleton may have copied a move or two from Hodell. Not just the music, but the air of surrealism, the use of horrid treated voices, and the making of unsettling collage artworks (of which some choice samples are reproduced in the booklet). With the little round spectacles and pointy beards, they even look a bit similar! What impresses me here is that, unlike most sound and voice collagists (Henri Chopin being an exception), there is an obsession with a minimal use of materials, both in terms of density of sound and in repetition. There is much repetition here, if not literal (as in the opener to *Brainwash*, with its mind-numbing army marching and its sergeant major's relentless '1,2,3,4') then at least formal: the entire musical material of 'Structuren' comprises artillery and aircraft weaponry from the two world wars, presented in chronological order of deployment. At times we are offered the opportunity to hear each sound in its own space, never are we in any doubt as to what we are hearing - the soundscape is never too crowded. The consequence is that we, like the composer, are directed by the structures to reflect on the content of each piece. This is especially effective on the first CD, from which the above examples are taken. Antimilitaristic, passionate, yet detached. Brutal, provocative, but with none of the hysteria that makes, say, Lettrist performances so unlistenable.

The second CD contains a series of lengthy, impressionistic works collected under the title 'Purgatory.' These demonstrate Hodell's skill at creating what he termed

'text-sound-compositions', where his speaking voice is cut up amongst a restricted palette of musique concrète sources. The sounds of a ferry, crows and primitive electronic transformations accompany his haiku-like poetry on 'The Djurgården Ferry across the Styx' to produce a mantra-like vision of Hell, created from the most mundane of materials. An odyssey it seems, a flight through memories and imaginary spaces, the black bird of ill-fortune carrying some fateful message across the centuries. Maybe the human race is doomed. Hodel's voice recites a litany of gloom, ending phrases with his repetitive 'Kraa-Kraa' utterance, juxtaposed to the sample of the Crow's caw.

'Cerberus, The Hellhound' is likewise a journey into one of the nine circles of Hell. Nine? Hodel just added another fourteen to the Infernal Ringway...it's partly rendered as a train journey, which is always an effective way to depict a 20th century Hades (just ask anyone who's travelled on Network South East). The iron rulers of Hell bark orders; doomed imprisoned souls march along, double-time. 'LAW AND ORDER!' shouts a stern commander, while beaten-down wretches recite meaningless chants. Another voice calls continually for the destruction of 'that place...tear the place down', but unclear whether he's seeking to raze the City of Hell to the ground, or one of our own earthly capitals. Either way, sound effects of bombs, sirens and crashing cars indicate that he got his way.

Two long tracks describe the 'Electric Buddha' project. 'The Road To Nepal' is composed of very abstract concrete tape manipulation, generating some extremely basic rhythms and drones; the tapes groan with agony, rather than sing with joy. Hodel makes little attempt to open up this claustrophobic landscape, the way the French School might do - he's focussed on the utter greyness of his own sound. '220 Volt Buddha', originally a musical stage work with slide projections, is a grotesque slowed-down tape of a voice. Organised into loops, it makes a mirthless moan against two notes of a percussion instrument. Then come waves of sluggish static noise, gongs sounding ominously, and harsh noises interrupting the melancholy like an unwelcome character in a Samuel Beckett play.

The final CD returns us to politics for the most: whilst the very English chanting of 'Where is Eldridge Cleaver?' in the piece of the same name sounds rather hackneyed, the mesmeric power of 'Mr. Smith in Rhodesia' - with its children's chorus repeating the Nazi-like incantations of the main speaker ('Mr. Smith is a good man', 'Mr. Smith gives us food and clothing'), at the same time as they are gradually drawn to the whispered subversive ('Mr. Smith is a murderer') - has perhaps even greater resonances in our own times, where so much of Hodel's anti-Smith rhetoric can be equally applied to the Mugabe regime. Certainly, the dreams of freedom essayed in this piece seem quite hollow today. If ever tape collage was heartfelt without being maudlin or sentimentalized, this is it.

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Distributed in the UK by These Records? If not, they might be able to help.

Morphogenesis

In Streams Volume 1

UNITED KINGDOM PARADIGM PD 16 CD (2001)

The Morphos are one of Britain's best experimental groups, working in an almost indefinable area that embraces elements such as group improvisation, electro-acoustic methods, tapes, radios, home-made instruments, and pure electronic music. Given the high quality of their few releases and live performances, it's surprising we don't hear more from them. But this is largely due to the infrequency with which the group plays in the first place. Their membership is slightly fluid and varies between four to six players, and it's not easy getting everyone to co-ordinate at the same time, especially as they all have other commitments. In the second place, there is a rigorous discipline to the release programme, which is abstemious - there's a large backlog library of recorded tapes, both studio and live experiments, but not all of these are deemed worthy for public inspection. On this release, for example, there's a remnant from 1996's Charivari project, originally released I think on the Streamline label. Plus three live events from 1997 and 1999.

Six very distinct and talented music personalities

feed into th' Morpho sound. I should stress that the processes of playing, recording and releasing within the group are quite egalitarian, and (though I once made the mistake of dubbing Michael Prime the 'main man'), there is no star player. Michael Prime of course is notable for his excellent electro-acoustic recordings involving natural phenomena like water, weather and plants. He might be responsible for the group's interest in using 'bio feedback' and the 'water machine'. Roger Sutherland (on one track only here) wrote a definitive book on the history and methods of 20th century music. Adam Bohman is a wonderful English eccentric who released a completely wackoid CD of his hand-held cassette diaries on the Paradigm label - which label happens to be run by Clive Graham, also a member of the Morphs.

Each of these sumptuous recordings has a slow-moving grandeur - you get the impression of a gigantic, lumbering (but very dignified) beast, with many limbs, moving slowly from one dark corner of a cave to the other. In our chosen field of music, slow-moving has sometimes been mistaken for non-eventful turgidity. The music of Morphogenesis could never be mistaken for uneventful! The richness of each musical episode reveals itself, gradually, through careful listening - but finally, each of these 'Streams' is brimming with ideas and fascinating sound events, like a stream full of salmon. You have only to lower your aural 'net' and fish in a fine harvest. There is respect in the playing - respect between the musicians, and for the listener. Despite the apparent slowness of everything, the changes that occur are in fact quite dramatic. If you could picture the 22-minute 'Live at the Windmill' track as a geological sample, for example, the seismic shifts in the layers of strata would be astounding.

Finally, perhaps it is worth stressing that there isn't a laptop or a sampler anywhere in sight on the Morpho table of instruments; nothing but good old analogue and acoustic equipment. The hands-on approach even extends to the way tapes are used - not simply played, but run manually over the tape-heads, inch by inch. Now that's what I call Morpho!

ED PINSENT

paradigm@stalk.net

Arsenije Jovanovic

Arsenije Jovanovic

FRANCE LA LEGENDE DES VOIX LDV008 CD (ND)

In 1999, when Belgrade was bombed during the struggle for the former Yugoslavia, the State TV station was destroyed - along with thirty years of work by one Arsenije Jovanovic, a renowned composer who's worked in theatre, radio, and TV with over 150 projects to his credit. 'I am asking myself what will be written in the History of the West in ten or twenty years, or maybe sooner, or never,' mused the composer in a message to an Internet notice board. He's entitled to be asking questions about history.

Arsenije Jovanovic was both author and director of the monumental television series 'The Time of Frescoes', 15 films about Serbian medieval monasteries and frescoes. He has several major radio compositions to his credit, and has won international awards.

Here, on a release compiled for Eric La Casa's label, are four tape-composition works from 1977, 1978, 1988 and 1993 respectively. Each of them are absolutely uncanny and demand your listening attention immediately. Jovanovic works largely with performing voices, and creates incredible layered sounds out of them; shimmering harmonies, new languages, prayers, and chants.



The Sound 9projector Ninth Issue 2001

Voices laughing, chattering, whispering, muttering and crying. The voices are supplemented by minimal instrumental backdrops, a makeshift orchestra for the insane; flutes, penny whistles, gongs and percussion; rattling stones, banging pots and pans. All of these unlikely elements, played and arranged with consummate lightness of touch, conspire to create a weightless space inside which the listener will float, and experience the delirium that the composer intends.

There's few clues in the booklet as to how this music is realised - I'm guessing when I say it's tape-composition. The composer uses the booklet to discuss his ideas and philosophy. He is inspired by the extremes of life, extremes of nature and human behaviour, and of ideas; and one who faces up to the challenge of attempting to express these extremes. The first two works reveal a preoccupation with caves - 'Invasions' has been recorded in a cave, while 'Resava Cave' is a musical exploration of a space which offers 'therapeutic silence' to the composer. That piece uses untrained musicians; Jovanovic is interested in unlocking 'precious and unexploited energy'. Both of these 'cave' works utilise strange, groaning voices and a rhythmical flow akin to a fleet of galley slaves rowing together; both tap into the 'ancient mysteries' almost effortlessly.

'The Island of the Dying Donkeys' is a 1988 work which resulted from an expedition to a lonely island where the composer was woken up by seagulls crying every day. He learned that old worn-out donkeys from a neighbouring village were sent to this island to die. He was struck by the cries of the gulls, and mused that they must be despairing having to listen to the cries of the dying donkeys. The intense music gives voice to all these unusual and powerful emotions; there are wailing women, rattling stones, and even a little sampled loop of a donkey braying. This is set against another churning rowboat-rhythm that emulates the sound of the tide lapping against the shore.

G K Chesterton (in *ManAlive*) described a man who walks entirely around the world, in order to return to his own home as a complete stranger; thereby to fully appreciate the value of something he had come to take for granted. In 'Ma Maison', Jovanovic describes a similar experience, where he returned home after a long absence and began to hear afresh the sounds of his home. He began to build an inventory of these sounds in his head, supplementing it with local noises from the neighbours, the weather, the local cats, and most impressively the 'nocturnal wintery silences'. When commissioned to realise this work in 1993 at a French electro-acoustic workshop, this sonic portrait of his house resulted. More than simply a collage of chiming clocks and mewling infants, it's a philosophical work, making abstruse connections between sound events, and filled with speculations about his own history and travels, and 'the search for the archaeological sonority' of the house. Listening to it now, it fills me with impossible longings, stirs some nameless nostalgia for an impossible past.

This is a unique record by a unique creator, which I seriously urge you to try and get hold of.

ED PINSENT

21 rue du 8 Mai 1945, 37270 Montlouis, France
Available via ANOMALOUS

David Tudor / John Cage Rainforest II / Mureau

USA NEW WORLD RECORDS 80540 2 2 x CD (2000)

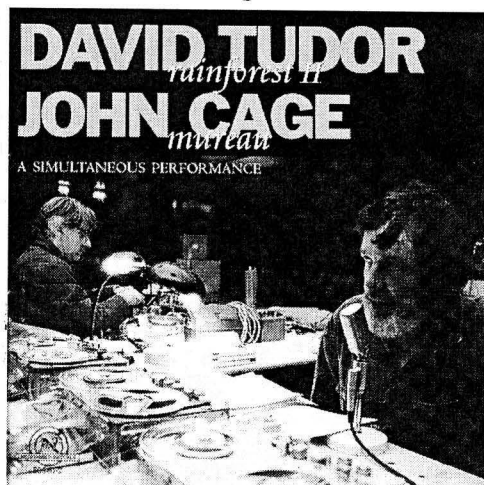
From 1972 comes this historic recording of a simultaneous performance - Tudor's live electronics, vs the vocal intonings and tapes of Cage. It lasts a long time, it's a challenging listen, but it's a resounding success. John Cage was deeply involved in the journals of Thoreau by this time; and by the late 1960s, he had started to re-evaluate his approach to making scores. Accordingly, he took certain passages of the writings of Thoreau (in particular, those to do with music) and subjected them to a set of chance procedures. He wound up with a complex collage, some of which was similar to the work of the French Lettrists: pages of isolated vowel-sounds, along with fragments of decontextualised texts. He used these to perform, in his own moaning intoning (deep) voice, the 'Mureau' component to this recording - and he experimented with variations in timbre, range and vocal delivery. Here, he does it live and uses three additional tapes of his own voice doing 'Mureau' - tapes which Tudor gets to process, along with his live electronics. By the end of these 90 minutes, you feel you've absorbed all the accrued knowledge of Thoreau, as if transmitted by hypnagogic methods.

Tudor's credentials as a major player in electronic / keyboard composition and performance were well established by this point and cannot be faulted. His 'Rainforest' music is a limpid series of transparent sounds, ingeniously woven into a continuous constantly-changing fabric; high sounds, suffocating sounds, tweeting, rattling. A virtual wildlife sanctuary, or greenhouse full of hothouse flowers, exotic smells and sights. Actually, it's impossible to nail down the dense pattern of conflicting and overlapping ideas, as the sounds never call much attention to themselves and remain undefinable. It is gorgeous to listen to, and remains truly 'new' music, defiantly experimental, different.

This release is also a rare example of a simultaneous performance by Cage and Tudor, recorded live by German Radio. They did it in the same performance space so they could see and hear what each other was up to. Hundreds of perfect overlaps and coincidences result. Their usual collaborative method was to sit in separate recording booths, to achieve that 'pure' chance effect. The one in this vein that everyone knows (even if they never heard a John Cage record) is *Indeterminacy*, a fine double LP originally on the Folkways label. That's full of little stories, Cage's zen-like observations extracted from his diary writings, pitched randomly against the abrasive squawks of Tudor's electronic blasts. But *Indeterminacy* is almost over-elaborate compared to the magisterial simplicity of this recording. The content is so dense, you feel like you're hearing weather systems explode all the way across the world at the same time, while a medicine man chants the wisdom of the ages. Verily, this is a meeting between The Ancient One and Dr Strange!

ED PINSENT

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Jon Rose / The Hyperstring Project New Dynamic of Rogue Counterpoint UNITED KINGDOM RER MEGACORP ReR JR6 CD (2000)

Often late at night I do the washing-up to Radio 3. If I'm lucky, I get 2nd. Viennese School, Lutoslavski or Penderecki to accompany me. At low volume so as not to wake my children, the atonal strings (strings work best for me) become submerged along with the pots and pans in

the soapy water, emerging cleaner and even stranger than before. This record will become a favourite alternative for this activity, when there's nothing but a Mahler or a Bruckner on the radio. Partly submerged, its textures (improvised violin solos triggering MIDI'd string samples) fit my requirements for dishwashing listening perfectly. Close up, though, without my own accompaniment, the pieces reveal themselves as frenetic, overfull fragments of the project Rose has been pursuing for many years - to hyperanimate the humble violin and its family, mechanically and digitally. I admire him for his tenacity and his vision, but I can't connect to this material in any satisfying way when its on its own. Add Fairy Liquid and I love it.

CHRIS ATTON

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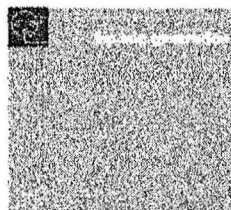


BiP-Hop Generation v.1 [bleep 01] december 2000
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a massive cache of blips, beeps, static resonance, distorted wavelength oscillations and twisted beats...

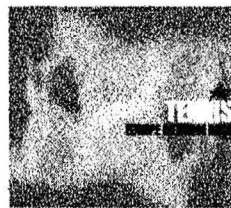


BiP-Hop Generation v. 2 [bleep 02] march 2001
AROVANE / BERNARD FLEISCHMANN / WARMDESK
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20 exclusive tracks, 70+ mins of music : electronica extravaganza.



BiP-Hop Generation v. 3 [bleep 05] june 2001
NEOTROPIC / PIMMON / BOVINE LIFE / NOVEL 23
ZONK'T / ATAU TANAKA

each new volume proves that this quarterly series is a great opportunity to become acquainted with the electronica-scene of today.



TENNIS : europe on horseback [bleep 03] april 2001
the rhythms slowly draw you into a cushioned saddle and an electronic trot then begins, taking us through fields of bubble bass, valleys of sonic glitches, and mountains blooming with digitalia. They never break into a gallop, conserving energy rather than letting it run wild. This record is a form of deconstructed dub/house which avoids 4/4 time at every corner creating a relaxed, challenging and accessible electronica lined with interesting bass lines.



SPACEHADS and MAX EASTLEY : the time of the ancient astronaut [bleep 04] may 2001

a world of high opera and tipsy beats that cascade with a metallic pounding. Haunting trumpet melodies over soft drones and textures sets the mood. The music takes on cinematic proportions as the terrain unfolds. Interstellar landscapes are revealed. Max Eastley plays The Arc. The Spceheads mix trumpet and drums. Instruments are fed into electronic effects.



BOVINE LIFE : social electrics [bleep 06] september 2001
digital artist, broadcast tv director and musician has been jamming through the modem, speaking in electronic tongues, and collaborating with Köhn, Third Eye Foundation, Future Pilot Aka, and artists from labels such as Mego (Alku), Leaf (Vlyptyk), Diskono...

SI-[CUT].DB : enthusiast [bleep 07] september 2001
digital/glitchy but accesible rhythmic realm, with dub and german influences to the fore...

soon :

BiP-Hop Generation v. 4 [bleep 08] september 2001
with Mira Calix (UK) / Si-(cut).db (UK) / Datch'i (USA) / Vs_Price (France) / Cray (Australia) / Twine (USA)

[reciproprocess : +/-vs.] vol. 1

BOVINE LIFE and/or vs. KOMET (Frank Breitschneider) [bleep 09] november 2001
split CD with two artists contributing a collaborative work; a series of independent works; and finally, contributing a remix of each other's work(s). Design by Fehler/courtesy of Fällt.

CRAY : undo [bleep 10] november 2001

"music being almost a painting, that you could stare at in a gallery" Cray is the current outlet for Australian sound merchant Ross Healy. Etched sound worlds; carved sine waves, slices of twisted time, but with a faint memory of melody.

VERY SPECIAL
NOTHING
MUSIC
Owning the Future

Ever since I started this 'column' in issue seven, I feel its success has been proven by the complete lack of feedback I've been getting from my many correspondents around the world. Yes, I take it that the value of silent music is demonstrable by the silence of my readers on the subject. A roaring silence. Undaunted, I find succour in the increasing number of ultra-minimalist recordings that really put the old hi-fi unit through its paces. The sampling below can only indicate the merest hint of the latest achievements in this area, but I'm encouraged by the interest leading away from quiet or silent records, and the move towards use of blank tapes, run-out grooves, or otherwise neglected sources; making music out of nothingness, as it were. Every time I surf the web, looking for the latest news reports on the current severe clothing shortage among young Japanese girls, I realise that the world is in poor shape. There are clearly some extreme conditions out there - some people can't even afford two laptop computers to rub together. Come to think of it, if you could put all the laptops manufactured in the last two minutes into a big pile, douse it with petrol and set fire to it, you would have an instant modern sonic arts festival. Like the man says, 10,000 banjos at the bottom of the ocean is 'a good start'. (EP)

Carl Michael Von Hausswolff
To Make Things Happen In The Bunker Via
The Micro Way
SWEDEN FIRE INC F-14 CD (1997)

As you recall, my enchantment with *Basic*, his Table of The Elements release, was expressed in several windy paragraphs which I blurted out in issue seven. I was intrigued enough to purchase this slightly earlier 'work' of his when it turned up at a shop - a Swedish release, one which boasts his full name, a self-consciously 'arty' batch of black-and-white photos on the sleeve, and six glorious bruits of absurdist noise identified with six equally absurdist, but poetic, long titles.

These 1997 noises aren't quite Nothing Music, but live in the realm of gentle and unobtrusive monotony. Except for half of them, which become excruciatingly painful and tedious to endure. The six cuts go like this: a gentle white roaring; a Geiger-counter blipping in stereo, two stuttering effects phasing in and out of synch; a throbbing amplifier hum; electric alien-speech mode chattering against an ocean of murmurs; a long single high tone; and a slower series of clicking and buzzes. These might be generated with primitive electronic equipment - some form of tone generator, fed through a mixing desk - but it's impossible for an ignoramus like me to say. I mean, I can't even recognise my own toaster in the morning.

CM's hard materialistic approach yields plain, untreated sounds. The sounds are far less treated than on *Basic*, remaining, erm, basic, raw and inert. He cuts against the grain of this mundanity by assigning strange, near-mystical titles to each piece, which simultaneously hint at the methods used, and add a semi-poetic dimension. For example, the Geiger-counter track is called 'Spirit Folio Lite Detector (No

Positive Results)', while the ocean of murmuring track is called 'A Quite Faster Spirit With Some Low Cyclic Interference'. Disinformation used to apply a similar interpretative layer to his recordings, finding the Voice Of God in the electrical thunder storms he released as 'Theophany'.

The title to this work suggests an operative at work involved in espionage; this hint appears to be backed up by the picture of his surveillance device, next to a book about the Third Reich film-maker Leni Riefenstahl. The title 'Electric Fence Controller Bugged By The Enemy Eraser', and the fact that half of this was recorded off the coast of Africa, does nothing to dispel the notion that CM is indulging in some kind of low-key Cold-War fantasy here, another area also mined by Disinformation and the Conet Project and similar paranoids. Then again, maybe he feels trapped in the 'bunker' of artistic stagnation, only able to communicate with the world through cryptic, minimalist radio broadcasts.

ED PINSENT

L.O.S.D.
7 Songs / 77 Frequencies
GOD FACTORY 7.7 CD (2000)

The acronym stands for Laboratory of Sonic Discovery. Nothing is known about the Lab, except that this piece was generated entirely using a PowerMac. Unlike some laptop music, which still retains a pretence of being a distant cousin of Techno or other form of music, this record is almost pure physics and pure mathematics. The perpetrators simply recorded a series of pure sine waves from a generator, raising it in steps according to a pre-determined structure. For this reason, there are 77 tracks here, each precisely 56 or 57

seconds long, so that (if you play the CD in sequence) you bombard your ears with an increasingly unbearable series of throbbing tones. If you can endure it until the very end, you might begin to enjoy the sensations of mounting excitement which you normally associate with finding a rare batch of 1950s knitting patterns in the Oxfam shop. Then again, if feeling really adventurous, then opt for shuffle play mode and reassemble this empty, electronic abstract mosaic into a new disruptive pattern. Succumb to the appeal of mathematical equations and discern the hidden coded messages inside them. Seriously, it's worth staying the course with this one, as it suddenly kicks into a new realm of insanity after the first 15 minutes, which are frankly a bit boring. It's impressive the protean qualities that can be produced from such a basic source; we move from whining insect noises to outboard motors in a fraction of a second. I'm reminded of that new Playstation 2 game (I think it's called FLYING CHEESE BUCKETS 2, or something like that) where you start out as a laboratory mouse in a maze, then end up as a gigantic tiger battling evil parrots in outer space. In all, the Lab have pulled off a single-minded and rather clever experiment which works pretty well.

ED PINSENT

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Akira

Yamamichi

Semilogie

SWEDEN FIRE INC f-21 CD (2001)

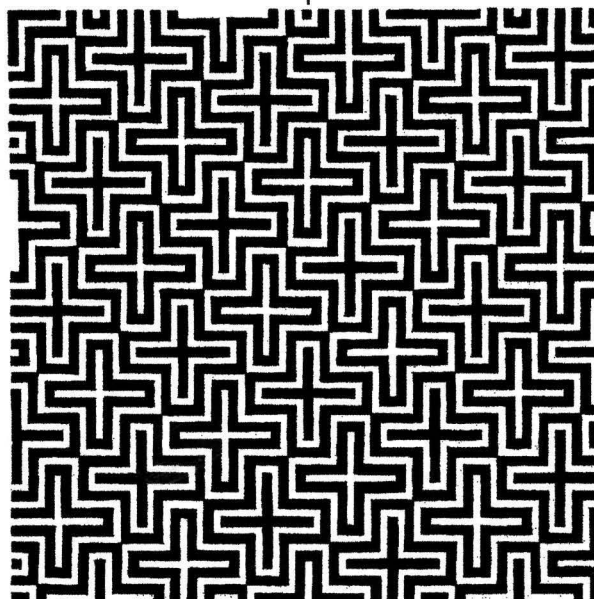
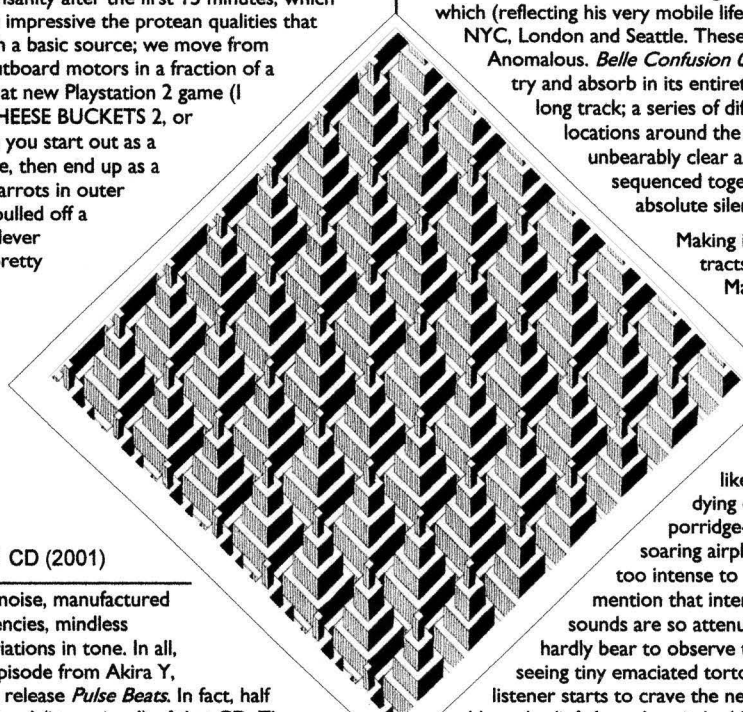
Very challenging synthetic noise, manufactured with extremely high frequencies, mindless repetition, and minimal variations in tone. In all, another bleakly inhuman episode from Akira Y, continuing on from his last release *Pulse Beats*. In fact, half of this CD is simply 'variations' (ie remixes!) of that CD. The full title, would you believe, is *Semilogie de la metamusique*.

What the devil is meta-music? I'm sure you're all familiar with meta-language, and probably use it every day writing a shopping list. I have to deal with meta-tags as part of my job. A meta-tag relates to computer information – it's kind of like information about information. The simplest form of a meta-tag is HTML, which you can examine for yourself in source mode on the web – it's when the computer requires an extra instruction to make word-processed text perform in a certain way. So, is Yamamichi-san proposing to play us music about music?

For the first five cuts, this is a wearisome excursion into a much weedier and non-entertaining form of techno music. Akira admits techno as an influence, but he doesn't do much with it except strip it down to almost nothing. This is followed by two experiments with pulse and percussion. 'Prototype of electro-acoustic jazz' is simply a few breathy high-pitched drones set against a thin high-hat percussion programme. There's also supposed to be some deconstruction of 20th century composition – probably every bit as good as Xenakis, I don't think! But that's about as far as I can manage with this one, folks...let me know if you fare any better.

ED PINSENT

*www.fire-inc.demon.nl
Distributed by STAAPLAAT*



Francisco López / Amy Denio

Belle Confusion 00

USA .ABSOLUTE. [SEATTLE] .a.[S] 002-00 CD (2000)

Francisco López / Michael Northam

Belle Confusion 0247

USA .ABSOLUTE. [SEATTLE] .a.[S] 001-00 CD (2000)

A brace of excellent new recordings on López's new label .Absolute., which (reflecting his very mobile lifestyle) has branches in Osaka, NYC, London and Seattle. These releases reached me through Anomalous. *Belle Confusion 00* is one which you may as well try and absorb in its entirety. Though episodic, it's all one long track; a series of different recordings from locations around the world, treated and escalated to unbearably clear and terrifying levels of volume – sequenced together with *loooooong* passages of absolute silence.

Making it to the end of these silent tracts requires the stamina of a Marathon runner – it's possibly the record-listening equivalent of crossing the desert.

When sounds imperceptibly begin to re-emerge from the silence after their long vacation, you're so grateful for them it's like a droplet of water to a man dying of thirst. Then again, maybe the porridge-like consistency of these soaring airplane-motor drones can get a bit too intense to endure after a while. Not to mention that intensely sad sequence, where the sounds are so attenuated and wretched you can hardly bear to observe their meager existence; it's like seeing tiny emaciated tortoises drying up in the sun. So the listener starts to crave the next passage of silence, simply as a blessed relief. As we're pitched back and forth between these two extremes, the work starts to acquire a simple pattern of tension, a series of structural oppositions, one of which cancels out the other. It's like exploring a very strange terrain from the air, without a map of flight plan, where two conditions prevail: we're either completely lost in the fog, or looking down on a near-empty plain through the clouds.

Not every listener will welcome this kind of 'belle confusion' into their private brain-space, and this kind of systematic and extreme experimentation not only plays hob with your expectations, it also appears to offer little in the way of normal enjoyment. However, if you can adapt yourself to its slow pace and learn to glean what you

can from the imperceptible movements upon its micro-structural surface, then I daresay you would then be equipped to endure any hardship or deprivation that life might have to throw at you. And that includes anything from a bout of insomnia, to long stretches of loneliness, starvation, life in prison, or being accidentally buried alive. And if you think some of those scenarios sound implausible, then you should come and visit my house sometime. Maybe we all need a bout of 'belle confusion' to develop a more meaningful relationship with the vagaries of the universe.

...the Mnortham disc isn't quite as compelling, lacking that push-pull dynamic of its sister CD, but only a captious listener could be seriously disappointed by it. Imagine the sound of church bells ringing across the English countryside, but

The Sound 9projector Ninth Issue 2001

you're 100 miles away and only a ghost of the clanging tone makes it across the wet and windy English weather. How your heart yearns to be the other side of the country, where the wedding or joyous service is taking place, but instead you're trapped in some dreary activity in a small village where nobody knows your name. Well, this approximates the feeling of distant longing evoked by these spectral timbres. The long tones mutate and shift gradually, acquiring strange new tonal values, and gaining something in intensity while losing an awful amount in terms of volume. The sad sounds drift away into the wind. Whether you can capture every last dying moment might depend on the effectiveness of your sound system. I estimate that there's about 40 minutes of this activity before a long silent stretch kicks in. Subsequent sound passages are, if anything, even more attenuated and sad; a will-o-the-wisp blowing from one speaker to another. You'll be straining your ears to catch anything, forcing your imagination to perceive something that is barely there...but how refreshed your senses will be. You may end up cancelling that booking at the avant-garde movie festival, because somehow the prospect of watching that film of clear acetate passing through a projector is just too gosh-darned *busy*.

ED PINSENT

PO Box 22195, Seattle, WA 98122-0195, USA
www.anomalousrecords.com

Francisco López

Untitled #92

AUSTRIA MEGO 034 VINYL LP (2000)

Chompy! This arrives looking as tasty as a bar of white milk chocolate, one of your writer's favourite snackeroos. A conceptual 'nothing music' work, pressed in white vinyl and composed of noisy scratch-samples taken from the runout grooves of LP records. Four tracks, each precisely ten minutes long, offering slight variations on the 'music' and 'rhythm' that derives from this very basic and inert sound-source. For a man who deals in 'absolute music', what could be more absolute than focussing on this sound-event, one that is an undesirable tiny 'fault' in the record-playing process. López zeroes in on the dead, silent grooves, and is determined to explore them to the utmost.

Unlike his other 'silent' records which (to me) seem to be saying something about the environment, this release is a pure concrete statement, and a genuine work of art. Natural that it should only exist as a vinyl record, so that form and content are inextricably bound into one elegant object. And what a sumptuous artefact it is, pure white vinyl with white stickers, a tiny amount of information printed around the rim of the label, and issued in a transparent sleeve within a plain white master bag.

The label contains a short conceptual remark by the artist: 'To Be Multi-Layered with Several Copies'. This refers to the overdubbing process he has used to transform the scratches into a forest of impenetrable sounds, and to the scratches your copy of the record will accrue over time. Quite different to another Mego release, *The End Of Vinyl* by Pure, who also used run-out grooves, but chickened out at the last minute and added lots of effects, including reverb and echo. López by contrast challenges you with the very inertness of this and dares you to accept it as music.

Guy Sherwin was a UK avant-garde filmmaker who made *At The Academy* in 1974. This short film was composed of nothing but superimpositions of rolls of academy leader (ie the 'countdown' of numbers before a film starts). It kept the viewer in a permanent state

of anticipation, thinking the film was about to begin. In the same way, López is taking the listener beyond the end of an LP record, into another sound dimension. Guy Sherwin, like other tough-guy UK filmmakers, clung to his tenets of 'Time As Illusion' and 'Time As Material' in his films. He was concerned with using devices that drew attention to the physical duration of the work. He wanted to escape the climactic-cathartic expectations that seem to come with all time-based artworks, including music. Some of these concepts might apply to López, too.

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Francisco López

Untitled #104

CANADA ALIEN8 RECORDINGS ALIENCD20 (2000)

I think it was Brian Eno who, when asked for an opinion on heavy metal, replied it was a form of ambient music. This is what the quiet Spaniard Francisco López (well, he was quiet until this Alien8 release came out) presents on *Untitled #104*. 43 minutes of environmental death metal ambience! (Um, anyone told Señor López that death metal seems to have been superseded by black metal these days?) Headphones are probably the best way to savour this disc, if you're not afraid that some or most or even all your brain cells might be wiped out while you're listening to it.

This disc begins silently but for the first five minutes there are teasing hiccups of guitar that get louder and more frequent until the CD launches straight into the bloc of music proper. It's actually looped recordings of a death metal band which seem repetitive on first listening but if you pay very close attention, you can discern two series of looped death metal fragments running in parallel; don't worry, the recordings do change quite a lot. Some time after the 20th minute, the music becomes monstrous; if you're hearing this on headphones, you're probably experiencing a cerebral meltdown as the texture of the piece is dense and relentless, scouring into your nerves like a sandstorm. More and more chaos seems to pile on through repetition (by this point, the two series of recordings have disappeared) and through additional bits of recordings being pasted on: what we might call the evolution of an organic system of death metal! About the 32nd minute, the CD abruptly plunges into silence but headphone wearers probably won't notice anything different because by then they may not have much of a brain left apart from those primitive reptilian bits that control their breathing and animal instincts. Which, come to think of it, three generations of heavy metal bands are said to have inflicted upon their fans since Black Sabbath began in 1968. But only Francisco López could have conceived the idea of inflicting heavy metal as an intense and abstract brain-destroying listening experience rich in texture with an underlying organisation and purpose beneath the apparent chaos.

Can't wait to find out what genre of music Señor López will trash - er, I mean, deconstruct and reconstruct on his next release: Jennifer Lopez or Celine Dion perhaps? (If so, we won't mind if that's a very silent CD!)

JENNIFER HOR

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Jliat

The Grand Series (Ambient) Still Life # 7 USA EDITION... XVI CD (2000)

Aha. After only two issues of writing about Nothing Music it seems that my self-fulfilling prophecy has come true. Here *is* a totally silent record. But - strictly speaking - it's not Nothing. I'm still trying to come to terms with this one. It's a conceptual work, built up on a mathematical structure, and comes with a warning that states 'This will probably not be rendered as sound by a CD player's DAC'. Well, he got that one right - I can't hear a bean. I kind of like the idea that there is *some* form of programmed information here, but it can't be unlocked by the technology it's intended for. So, where does this leave us?

James Whitehead is proposing the old questions about infinity. His model is a lamp that is switched off and switched on, but the ancients used a similar model of an arrow which has to cover half the distance to the target, then a quarter of the distance...eventually proving that since it's theoretically possible to continue to break space down into fractions, the arrow never reaches the target at all. Whitehead puts forward the Grandi equation (one of Rudy Rucker's favourite mathematical conundrums), a series of numbers discovered by the 18th century mathematician and applied by Grandi to suggest how God brought something out of nothing and started the cosmos. From here, Whitehead speculates that the universe is an interference pattern of energy, produced by a wave function out of phase with itself.

James Whitehead, aka Jliat, has thus programmed digital data onto the disc that reflects the Grandi formula, and pressed this CD with the injunction for us to play with infinite repeat. Although you can't hear anything as you do so, I nonetheless urge all of you to purchase this item and play it often, and this for two reasons:

1. It's a great relief from the noise of the day. You can 'frame' an hour's quiet time by putting this CD on, sit there vegetating, praying, or composing your mind, then let the whirr of the player tell you that time's up.
2. We can take part in an experiment to demonstrate something about the nature of infinity. There may be unforeseen effects to the action, not in your life (or indeed your lifetime) but somewhere else on the other side of the world. Maybe if we all did it, it might be like the project using your PC's downtime to crack the cancer genetic code.

Hmm- I had a lot to say about Nothing, after all.

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Reynols

Blank Tapes

GERMANY TRENTE OISEAUX TOC 002 CD (1999)

One of the most uncharacteristic Reynols releases, matched only by *10,000 Chickens Symphony* for its more high-minded aspirations and its brutalist approach to the art of musique concrète. *Blank Tapes* is a triumph of modern minimalist tape-work, which is probably why Bernhard Günter saw fit to release it on his Trente Oiseaux label where it might join some distinguished company. While still serious in intent, this does retain a deal of the Reynols humour - and their perverse, magical power is still much to the fore.

Acting as usual on the instructions of Miguel Tomasin who commissioned the band to produce a work using nothing but blank tapes as the source material, the crew set off to Ornitivo Studios in Buenos Aires and devised this in the first four months of 1999. Fittingly, *Blank Tapes* starts off with total silence, before a near-imperceptible hissing appears - a bit like the ocean, heard from a long distance. This acquires a few more layers of overdubs, the re-recording process dirtying up the sound. Increased high tones make it start to roar - the roar of blankness, the roar of silence. The lower tones drop away. This is replaced by a new edit, a long passage of mid-range extremely grey and abstract drones. It gets deeper and more resonant, and even starts to acquire a 'rhythm' of sorts, as you imagine you can hear the very particles of seething oxide dancing about on the strip of plastic. We're in the bowels of the earth, fascinated - and mysterious black camions roll by.

Another quieter passage follows, perhaps the most beautiful on the CD - a tranquil sojourn by the ocean of blank tapes, as each successive overdub increases the feel of the tidal pull of magnetic waves, lapping against the beach. You're about to drift into the arms of Morpheus, when a massive jet-engine ROOAR bursts in, completely disrupting the serenity - and this is the perverse humour of Reynols at its best, lulling you in a false sense of security, then all of a sudden - BLAMMO! We're ground into mincemeat under the steel wheels of a bulldozer. After a respite of a more metallic, ringing tone for some minutes, the airplane roar returns, only ten times louder,

and more ferocious. It's a solid block of nothingness that knocks you flat or crowds you out of the room. What power - and all from a blank tape.

I used to dread using my old mono cassette recorder in the mid-1970s. The blank bits at the end of a tape would somehow fill me with despair - the hissiness of it, the sense of utter absence after the music, the feeling that I could hear the tiny capstans of the player turning around and measuring out the futility of my life. There's a disturbing charm to this aspect of technology that even Dolby cannot erase. Then there's the conceptual visual artist who, preoccupied with our perceptions of nothingness and the possibilities of mechanical processes, once photocopied a blank sheet of paper. Due to imperfections on the copier glass, and within the process of xerography itself, the copy he got wasn't quite as blank as the

original. He copied the copy, and repeated that process some 25-50 times. The final *n*th-generation sheet was a mass of grey, abstract shapes - not terribly interesting to look at, but neatly demonstrating the same something-out-of-nothing trick that Reynols pull off here. The difference is that they have created a beautiful and brilliant work.

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CODA

You may think that, between the above release and López and his end-of-groove LP, we've hit some kind of artistic dead-end in music, an apocalyptic situation where only the fag-ends of the very materials of vinyl and tape can be used as raw material for our art. On the contrary, these works should give us hope for the future. In occupying these two extremes, Reynols and López have showed us that art can exist absolutely anywhere, like a powerful micro-organism that thrives even under the most harsh conditions. These works are an opening-up, not a closing-down. Absolute works like this should point the way to even further extreme endeavours. Well, that's about it from me folks...must go and seal myself into a ice-cube for the night.

THE UNOBTUSIVE UPROAR (A shade more noticeable than VERY SPECIAL NOTHING MUSIC)

Jeffrey Allport

Solo Percussion

CANADA CELO 002 MINI CD (2001)

A short solo percussion record by this fine Canadian musician. I have to say it's a benchmark of achievement in the 'barely discernible' school of playing. Each small sound is magnified. I have an image of a mouse playing the thimbles with a pair of darning needles, but I probably saw that in Beatrix Potter. Allport seems tentative, but his gentle scrapings and tappings connect with some Zen view of the world, where the silence around him speaks more than any contribution he can make to the great universal dialogue going on around us. He recorded it all in one fine morning in the month of March, laying it direct onto his DAT machine in a single take with no overdubs. The muffled sound of a car parking outside can be discerned; it makes more noise than he does! You may need to play this on a very good stereo in order to catch every rattle and ting, and make sure you are paying attention. It's like hearing the sketch of a sketch; the gestures a painter might make in his mind, before even picking up the watercolour brush.

ED PINSENT

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Jeffrey Allport / Tim

Olive

[No title]

CANADA CELO 001 3" CD (2000)

This, the very first home-made release on Celo recordings, likewise belongs in the 'not bothering you am I?' school of playing. Seven tracks, recorded live at home, without overdubs by these two gentle-folk. Olive gently scrapes his acoustic guitar, and Allport tinkles his percussion as quiet as a mouse, occasionally making his glass bowls 'sing' like wineglasses. Respecting each other's space, the duo leave huge gaps and silences, and on occasion the spaced-out patterns become disconnected. This record barely coheres as a continuing sound-event, let alone as music. Yet the *presence* of the musicians is somehow felt very strongly. Admittedly, if you're in the mood for something robust and aggressive, this may disappoint; it can even appear timid and ineffectual, and annoy the bejabbers outta yez. But for those 'Camomile Tea' moments in your life, it can fit the bill precisely, and a little withdrawn contemplation might be exactly what you need. Try it after a hard day's physical labour and its unobtrusive gentleness is quite beautiful. Both artists share interests in areas like improv and electro-acoustic, but they also like Asian music, so-called Onkyo music, and the philosophy of John Cage. Fully aware of the history and precedents that exist in the field of guitar-percussion duos, most of which are noisy and brutish, Allport and

Olive choose deliberately to follow a different, less assertive path.

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Tore Honoré Bøe

Siesta

NORWAY JAZZASSIN RECORDS
JAZZ016 CD (2000)

Five tracks of strange, highly abstracted, and restrained noises; the Norwegian creator is an impressive craftsman of assemblage and mixage. His listening tastes favour the 'traditional' tape-collage method, which might mean he works with tape and razor blade instead of the easier route of hard-disk editing. I doubt it, though. Regardless of method used, the way he deploys his compelling sources (very small sounds, recorded mostly with even smaller contact microphones) is masterful, magnifying tiny events and small objects into the wide-screen frame of stereo separation. The flapping ladybird unhooks its wings and reveals a tiny orchestra concealed within its armour.



When artists limit themselves to this extreme degree, there's a danger that their results simply end up undernourished, thin and uninteresting - and there are such narrow-minded creators, yet these clowns persevere, refusing to expand or develop the idea, in the name of 'keeping it minimal'. Not so in the case of Bøe, who understands that using a restricted range is a firm discipline. The challenge for him is whether he can sustain your interest for long enough. Siesta provides ample evidence that he can. You'll be on the edge of your seats...particularly with the eerie tension of the closing track 'Ghoul', a highly apt soundtrack for observing phantom apparitions. Or even for summoning them forth, perhaps.

Norwegian Bøe has been associated with the Origami Republika project, whose work I really must investigate one of these days - there's a double LP by Origami Galaktika (*Eesti Libbed Silmad Süda*) which is supposed to be pretty essential.

ED PINSENT

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Jeph Jerman

The Second Attraction

USA ANOMALOUS RECORDS NOM 7
CD (2001)

Jeph Jerman is the American musician who, as Hands To, released the gorgeous record of 'cactus music' which we reviewed in issue seven. He's an elusive artist whose singular approach to his work means that is virtually impossible to record satisfactorily; indeed the label has taken some pride in stating that an acceptable and effective recording of his unobtrusive work has finally been realised (in this instance by Doug Haire, in 1999). Jerman is not an artist who exists simply to create product. Most of his rustic performances have been before an audience of nil, as he played found objects (stones and wood) out on his jaunts across the American countryside. He's a determinedly non-electric musician, and often refuses amplification for his minimal work.

The ideal situation for hearing this music would be simply sitting next to Jerman as he gently agitates his stones, his shells, and other natural forms. *The Second Attraction* comes close to a realisation of that intimate situation, and it's a short but completely entrancing record. Though some may be sceptical of his semi-mystifying observations about the sounds of his stones 'answering' sounds within the room, these are based on a deep understanding of acoustic properties, and if you listen carefully you will find he's not lying...and they have translated well to this record. His claim to be an improviser is valid; 'I can reach a point where...I am just noticing that my hand is moving', he states, suggesting he enters intense trances of playing through communing with his chosen instruments. And *chosen* is the right word here; he doesn't simply pick up any old piece of flotsam from the ground. Only the correct stone, seashell, or branch will do the job; he clearly has a set of highly developed (and very personal) criteria for how to recognise natural forms for their acoustic properties.

If we all tried similar exercises, the chances are we could learn to develop a closer relationship to nature. Heaven knows we need one. I recently saw an awful family in the park near where I live, who'd broken off dozens of daffodil heads just to hand them over to their filthy offspring, to use as playthings. Needless to say, these flowers were trampled into the dirt within seconds. People think nature is 'free' garbage, which they can pick up and throw away, because it belongs to nobody. We need a Jeph Jerman to help us appreciate the real beauty and value of some of nature's finest gifts, and remind us that the earth belongs to all of us; we should act as good custodians of the earth, not careless tenants.

ED PINSENT

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NO PROBABLE PURPOSE

RECORDS WHOSE REASON FOR EXISTENCE, or intended listening audience, is not immediately clear. The overall artistic intention remains elusive. Yea...I know we could probably say the same of all the records in this and every issue, but these releases really call attention to the idea...In an age of niche-marketing, direct selling, pre-testing and over-categorisation are denying our eccentric and human responses to everything, what else can we do. At a time when dreary 'common sense' is everywhere, I want to defy common sense, with absurdity, insanity, delirium...at a time when the power of imagination is denied at every turn, I want texts and sounds that stimulate the imagination into even greater capacity than before. If everything around us is supposed to have some worthwhile purpose, then I want more things that have no purpose at all. The phrase 'No Probable Purpose' is adapted from Alasdair Willis. (EP)



Ocsid

Opening Sweep

UNITED KINGDOM ASH INTERNATIONAL ASH 5.7 CD (2001)

From Munich comes this magnificently awesome monolith of music, a complex noise-assemblage replete with dark undertones and cosmic messages. This long continuous piece opens with a throbbing mighty bass drone at the lower end, littered with high-pitched feedback and other bizarre debris near the top end. In between, muffled voice samples are layered into the sandwich. One of the more obscure and mysterious musical actions, which we rely on Ash International to bring to our attention. Recorded at a Munich nightclub by Edvard Graham Lewis, Jean-Louis Huhta, Peter Pfaff and the mighty Carl-Michael Von Hausswolff. En passant, I'd like to say that the two releases by CM which I've managed to stumble

across are enough to convince me that he is indeed the key-holder to a gateway into another dimension.

As its title indicates, *Opening Sweep* is filled with swooping sounds, gigantic sheets of abstract noise which drop down from the skies like huge black tarpaulins onto their unwilling victims, writhing on the sands below. As you're enveloped and trapped in this smothering din, predatory birds such as condors or vultures swoop down from the mountains and use their beaks in a razor attack, while belabouring your body with their mighty wings. An immersive experience which I'm sure you will find enjoyable.

Then there's the radio voice-samples episode, which easily transcends the lesser efforts of many a joker in this

often-attempted area of sound collage. It's an eerie sequence. Ghostly, unintelligible fragments of voice float and hover over a sinister, foreboding organ-note drone of imminent doom. A moment of banal pop song is selected, and transformed into a message from the Oracle. A second of newscast is plucked from the ether, then looped into an echoing repeat. All of these dead voices are like phantom apparitions, not inappropriate given that Ash International have just released a follow-up to *Ghost Orchid*, another set of voices of the dead which mysteriously manifest themselves over the radio or on tape machines. The strategy is echoed on the sleeve art, with its postage-stamp sized distressed images of faces hovering like TV specters on video screens. The voices slowly dissipate, only to be replaced by the invading army of lumbering robots marching slowly in; their steel feet crashing into the earth, their circuits flashing blue fire. Soon joined by other nameless horrors. The meaning of this terrifying parade remains obscure. Nonetheless, the piece proceeds to its grim conclusion with an inexorable purpose.

Not many pieces of music are able to convey such unnameable emotions: awe and fear, certainly, but also a sense of mystified wonder at our own humanity, and the things present in the universe which we can't even begin to understand. Quite a rare thing, really. If there is any artistic precedent for *Opening Sweep*, I would suggest a list that begins with Samuel Beckett and ends with Mark Rothko. Recommended.

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**Michèle
Bokanowski
Trois
Chambres
d'Inquiétude**
USA ELEVATOR
BATH EEAOA07 CD
(2001)

Here's some disquieting musique concrète of the very first water. This perfectly-constructed sequence of miniatures is only half an hour long, but conjures up a (fairly grim) vision of infinity. As befits these three 'rooms of unrest', each

episode is delineated by worrying, neurotic lines of abstract music which nags away at your cortex incessantly. The first 'room' caused my sister to comment sarcastically 'how many fathoms deep are we now?', and indeed listening to it IS like being on board a doomed submarine, locked away beneath the icy depths in a steel chamber, with a crew of dangerous psychopaths for company. Room two offers little relief; it's a cross between an oxygen tent and the rubber room in an insane asylum. Such brooding tension – as if awaiting the next bout of electro-shock treatment from the evil doktors.

Once the feelings of claustrophobia have passed, you can mop your sweaty brow and admire the sheer quality of these sounds, the economy of Bokanowski's editing and the intelligence of her arranging skills. The third 'chamber' comprises four very distinct short sounds, separated out beautifully; a gentle percussion loop, a drone, a plucked harp string, a woman's gasp. Unlike so many of the Schaeffer school, she is capable of eschewing intensive re-processing, and allows the recordings to breathe. Nor does she opt for the violent, show-off dynamics beloved of so many digital-philos on the Empreintes Digitales label.

These three were recorded at the composer's studio in Paris and first performed in 1976 at a music festival in Bourges. MB has composed mostly for live performance, but has a CV embracing film, television, theatre and dance work with various collaborators. She has a distinguished pedigree, having studied music with Michel Puig in the late 1960s before enrolling with the grand maître Pierre Schaeffer himself at ORTF in 1970. She's studied computer music at University, and electronic music with Eliane Radigue.

ED PINSENT

www.elevatorbath.com



**Leif Elggren / Per Jonsson /
Kent Tankred
Ugn Mat**

UNITED KINGDOM ASH INTERNATIONAL ASH
5.3 CD (2000)

Here's another 'mind-baffler' special which I take as a healthy indicator that the Ash International project remains firmly on target with its agenda to provide the world with more than its fair share of intensive art recordings. Not that this is some incomprehensible 'concept' piece; trust your ears, not your brain, because after one listen you will be hooked into the flow. The rec comprises two longish suites, both of which are made of unrecognisable low roaring and droning sounds, intercut with distorted old records struggling to make it past the flow of dense gaseous forms. There's old opera records in the first batch, and whispering voices in the second which might be Gregorian chant or simply a bunch of secretive monks. You can bet your life it ain't the Holy Writ they're discussing, brothers. Using old records to add that haunted feeling to your work is always a good move (ask Philip Jeck), and it works superbly here.

As it turns out, what we're hearing is the documentary recording of two utterly absurdist and bizarre performance actions by that well-known Swedish loon, Leif Elggren - along with the help of his mateys Per Jonsson and Kent Tankred, the latter of which joined Leif with that infamous ship-hammering project (see *The Object*, reviewed in issue 7). Besides being silly, the actions involved here are also pretty funny. For 'Ugn', which means simply 'Oven', the Swedes piled a load of porridge into orange-painted ovenware, and bunged the whole shebang into some ancestral oven, letting it cook away while they smashed things up on stage with sledgehammers. Some of this violence, including the breaking of glass, is audible in the finished product - which at times seems to locate the listener right *inside* those fucking ovens, watching with dismay as bubbling porridge pots explode everywhere. As an added treat, the CD itself is painted orange, perhaps to suggest that it too is implicated in the action, and it should explode in a hideous mess as it 'cooks' itself inside the 'oven' of your CD. Play it loud enough and it just might do that. Won't you look a sight when you open the door to your friends, with hot porridge dripping all over you!

Very coincidentally, the 'Mat' suite is also something to do with food - guys in false beards, strapped to beds on stage and kept awake while they're fed potatoes and whisky. Which places it somewhere midway between a Beckett drama, and a typical day at the Glastonbury rock festival. Both of these 'actions' speak of delirious

UGN
LEIF ELGGREN PER JONSSON KENT TANKRED
MAT

The Sound 9projector Ninth Issue 2001

absurdity to this listener, thus lifting my weary spirits - and the very thought of them happening at all (let alone yielding such powerful music) is enough to induce fits of sweating. 'Ugn' happened in 1984, the other in 1989; this release coincides with an exhibition of Leif Elggren's works, and the release date is significant in the alternative 'calendar' that holds sway in the imaginary kingdom - Elgaland-Vargaland - over which this major loon presides.

In short this is an absolute corker of a disc. Keep it alongside the Ocsid *Opening Sweep* record and play them whenever you need a good dose of awe-inspiring fear and humour in equal measures.

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Aeron Bergman

The Tale of the Unhappy American

GERMANY TOMLAB TOM11 CD (2000)

Another curio from this Lucky Kitchen fellow. A gentle, dream-like narrative is spun using samples, sound effects and laptop manipulation, and a calm voiceover which relays fragments of the episodic tale. Friendly, approachable electronic tones seep out; you see, MEGO players, you don't have to use the laptop so aggressively *all* the time. Determinedly non-Ambient however, the music mostly resembles the sounds of malfunctioning goldfish-tank motors, or attempts to convey the effect of softly-falling snow. This rek has an affecting quality likely to appeal to fans of arthouse cinema; *22 Short Films about Glenn Gould*, that sort of thing. There are science-fiction elements, but more in the realm of Tarkovsky's *Stalker* than *The Terminator*. Contemplation of the landscape, mountains and streams. Psychological puzzles. Strange, slow-moving, barely perceptible narrative events. Symbolically-charged characters, like the 'old man' sitting on a stone bench at the top of the mountain, passively observing the 'terrible fight' which seems central to the tale. A conflict which might indeed be the cause of the American's unhappiness. Interestingly, the terrible fight track was recorded with the help of Jason Tar's vacuum, whatever that means.

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Alejandra and Aeron

Folklore Volume One: La Rioja

LUCKY KITCHEN 009 CD (2001)

Alejandra and Aeron

Haunted Folklore One: Ruinas Encantadas

LUCKY KITCHEN 010 CD (2001)

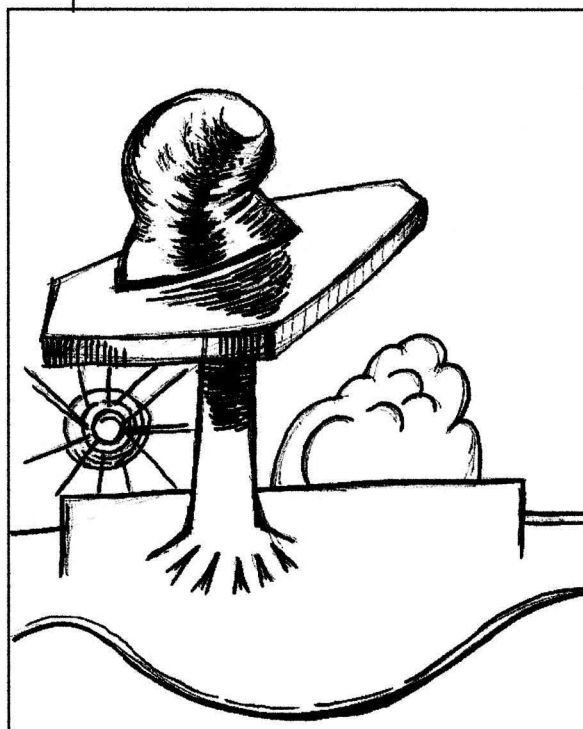
Unusual brace of related CDs here. *La Rioja* is a raw series of documentary tapes gathered by Alejandra Salinas and Aeron Bergman, over three years, from peasants living in the villages and mountains of the Rioja district in Spain. It's a highly odd mixture of things - singing in bars, music, sheep bleating, whistling, talking, the noise of Spanish peasants going about their business. Radio, traffic sounds, festivals, people drinking. Family rituals. The idea is to show how fully integrated with real life is the folk music of the Riojan region of Spain. A heartfelt and very genuine attempt to capture something real, in a 'warts and all' approach. Maybe their radar has been a bit too indiscriminating. But while the recordings and editing are free-ranging and wild, the sleevenotes pull everything back together and recontextualise it. At least when Peter Kennedy recorded folk song in the UK, he gathered some very decent performances; even if the singers weren't technically great, they decided to go for broke and recorded some lusty, full blooded performances. Here, by contrast, the songs and musics seem indifferent, the same as if you'd recorded a bunch of office-workers humming to themselves. This, I assume, is down to A&A's steadfast refusal to 'interfere', and to gather in sounds in a transparent, unobtrusive manner.

Ruinas Encantadas is to my mind more successful. The pair state that this was 'forged at the tail end of the *La Rioja* project, with sounds sentiments and structures of Riojan folk in [our] heads'. It's a series of very 'severe reworkings' of some of the live documentary material gathered at those sessions. That's putting it mildly. These are extremely radical remixes; they consist mostly of wild electronic sounds, barely connectible with the rustic charm and peacefulness of the originals. Yet traces remain. At least one track is formed of the pauses and gasps for breath

which the singers take before bursting into song; little snapshots of sunny days are somehow crammed into this odd mosaic. The first track is like a contrived attempt to construct an imaginary old recording of folk song, the sort of exotic 78 rpm disc that ends up in collectors' museums. Traces remain in the titles too; the whole enterprise is informed by a sympathetic understanding of the Spanish countryside, its legends and folk music, history and tradition retrievable from even the most extreme of these loud, modern electronic noises. A dream of sunlight, wine, a community.

ED PINSENT

www.luckykitchen.com



Various Artists

I Love Fantasy

LUCKY KITCHEN 011 CD (2001)

Alejandra & Aeron are pretty much the 'executive producers' of this, as they stress the 'folk and legend' aspects of the music on this curious and wonderful release. 'A Society without fantasy is inert' is their bold claim - we need imagination, we need religion, we need utopian images to affect change. All of this music exists 'somewhere between a laser light show and a shooting star', that is to say it's a contemplation of the power of man's artifice, and the frightening power of nature.

Here's four short pieces which live up to that claim. Aerospace Soundwise from Chicago emanate a chilling soft, white drone that is like spending an hour on top of a mountain, lost in a blizzard, buried in a snowdrift. Besides evoking the indifferent brutality and cruelty of nature, they remain resolutely electronic - as the amplifier hum will remind you. Evol from Barcelona use their track to relate a shocking tale of 'Animal Justice', in both text and sound, with their samples of dogs barking, growling and whimpering, intercut with violent electronic noises. The samples grow more menacing as the complexity of the electronic processing increases, suggesting a forced change, animals mutating into cyber-monsters. This snarling episode is a vast improvement on their picayune MEGO release, I trow.

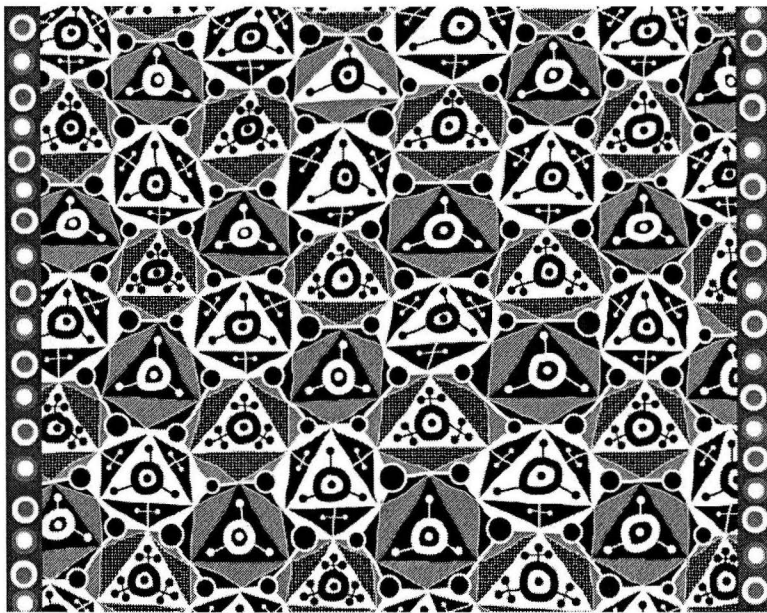
The Sound 9projector Ninth Issue 2001

From Hamburg, we have Felix Kubin with Klangkrieg and Reznick. They have another curious narrative, involving the Cosmonaut Yuri Gagarin. The story is about deception, suggesting that the fear of unknown outer space was too much for the Russian scientists, who contrived events to change it into a human story of heroism. But the terrors of outer-space come very much to the fore in this unsettling track – even though it has an endearing (and appropriate) clunky, sci-fi feeling. The album closes with a track from Onkyo musician and sampler heroine Sachiko M. Eschewing a narrative or text, her only printed statement is a short row of numbers. Perhaps this is a vision of digital computer hell, belied by the near-religious purity of her sine-wave drones. The record thus closes in prayer. Contemplate the mathematical geometric perfection of a snowflake (see front cover) as you listen.

Concentrate on this music. All four of these intense miniatures should help to loosen the shackles that tie you to the banal trivialities of life, and aid the creative mind to foster new fantasies, new ideas about possibilities for the future. If so, then *I Love Fantasy* will have been a resounding success. 'Survive awfully boring by drifting away'.

ED PINSENT

www.luckykitchen.com



Dave Soldier and Richard Lair Thai Elephant Orchestra

USA MULATTA RECORDS MUL004 CD (2000)

Imagine - a group of Asian elephants composing and performing music! And if elephants could compose and play music, what sort of music would they create? Astonishingly, the music is vaguely New Age-ish, but with none of the pretentious ambitions and posturing. This Thai Elephant Orchestra project is the brain-child of neurologist David Sulzer, who composes and produces music under the name David Soldier, and elephant expert Richard Lair who is the advisor at the Thai Elephant Conservation Centre in Northern Thailand. Elephants there have also been given painting materials to create their own artworks. (I understand a book of these paintings, documenting the painting project, has been published.)

The CD divides into 3 parts: the 1st and longest part consists of 12 tracks of improvised music by six young elephants on instruments made or adapted for their use and based on a musical scale similar to that used in traditional Thai music. The music is slow, and has a solemn, contemplative air - you can easily imagine yourself in a Buddhist temple during meditation time and hearing the music wafting through the surrounds. Believe it or not, every track has a definite beginning and ending (the animals received cues to start and stop) and the elephants (two of whom were aged 17 and 18, the rest aged 6 to 9 years) demonstrate a keen sense of rhythm and structure, particularly on tracks like 'Swing Swing Swing' and 'Heavy Logs' (many tracks have whimsical titles, like 'Now We're Off To Paint'), and quickly work out the best instruments for playing beats and rhythms, or melodies. The elephants also play in distinct musical metres. The youngest elephant musician,

Luuk Kob, shows himself to be a virtuoso on the diddley bow (a drum with a wire), hitting it in such a way that the instrument sounds right every time and the music does not jar. Thankfully, Luuk Kob does not have a mammoth-sized ego (cough, cough) to match his drumming skills but then, he's only 6 years old and in his part of the world, no-one has heard old Led Zeppelin bootlegs.

Part 2 features music played by both elephants and humans; the humans play a theremin and an electronic keyboard. The 3rd part features music played or sung by humans about the elephants and includes a string band made up of the elephants' trainers, a solo performance by one trainer on the renat (a Thai xylophone) and a song by Thai schoolchildren. For good measure, there is also a track of elephant field recordings, consisting mostly of low-itched grumbles and purrings with the occasional bellow - not quite William Bennett or Diamanda Galas territory I'm afraid!

A 12-page booklet explains the details of the project. No matter what your opinion regarding the ethics of elephants playing music for the entertainment of humans may be (even if the animals are composing the music and enjoying themselves), I would urge you all to put aside your views and to hear this CD. The music may not be exciting but it is more than a curious novelty and I find it much more engaging on the ear and the mind than most human-made music inflicted on us humans thru commercial music media.

Apparently, Soldier and Lair are preparing a follow-up CD which will be more populist and accessible to the public and to children in particular in order to raise funds for elephant conservation projects; there will be more elephant musicians involved and Luuk Kob with his drum kit looks set to be the, er, Ginger Baker or John Bonham of the elephant world so make of this project what you will ... I hope there won't be any 30-minute diddley bow solos...

JENNIFER HOR

www.mulatta.org

Vitamin B12

The Vitamin B12 2 LP Gatefold Set

NO LABEL, NO NUMBER 2 X VINYL LP Limited to 99 numbered copies

A follow-up to the mysterious Vitamin B12 four-LP boxed set, released many years ago, which few people dared to buy. This new one is a similarly determinedly independent-minded release, presumably self-financed, and released in tiny quantities within a gorgeous three-colour silkscreened gatefold cover. A booklet and limitation slip are included, and a photocopied track listing. What's more, the music is great too!

As Vitamin B12, Alasdair Willis does something quite unique. His music resembles a witty pastiche of 1960s beat music, also emulating a form of EZ-Listening music, so beloved of the 'Loungecore' and Soundtrack-worshipping brigades, which is realised by stitching together beats, intros and melodies stolen directly from an 'Incredibly Strange' record collection. On top of this, eccentric keyboard music and drum machines are added, occasionally supplemented by guitar solos. The weird organ and synth lines are just gorgeous, insanely daring in their impertinence. The finishing touch is a fragment of a lyric sampled from some cheesy movie or TV soundtrack, or perhaps even performed by actors - usually just a sentence, or a single word made into a chant. These lyrical additions can form penetrating observations, but mostly just add to the general air of riotous lunacy. 'To be alive is to be in a state of permanent insanity,' he notes.

I should point out that (despite your likely expectations) this isn't a kitschy exercise. This is actually a quirky form of modern composition, obliquely intelligent, but working within the framework of familiar and in some cases 'despised' sources, often looked down on for their banality. Through their re-use in this music, these banal sources re-acquire a new and resonant meaning. The sampling and quoting is done with real affection, not a sarcastic sneering tone. Vitamin B12 are not about irony, but about ideas; through these two-dozen 'pop song' parodies, the musician asks us questions about the way we absorb information, and how we are processing it. It relates to one of the disquieting observations in his booklet: 'I am trying to assess how much new information is actually entering the brain and how much is just being re-hashed', he states with precision. 'It isn't the easiest of tasks. I look at something and even before I consciously realise I have already assumed what it is, my relationship to it, its probable purpose.' Challenging that assumption, it seems to me, is what this record is all about.

As the record grows progressively odder over the progress of its four sides, it makes sense to play it in order. We find that, despite the presence of experimental techniques, this isn't experimental music; it's far too well-crafted and meticulously assembled for that. The creator has a gift for editing, for spot-on timing matched only by People Like Us, and slips moments of sheer genius into micro-second windows within his fast-changing time signatures. He knows how to manage wild, startling contrasts, and how to make the acoustic dissonances work for him. It is a shame that more people will not hear this LP, but there are several MP3s available at his website for those who wish to download. Vitamin B12 is an economical craftsman, a miniaturist, a witty philosopher, and a fascinating mystery man.

ED PINSENT

www.remotevillage.free-online.co.uk
Record available from **THESE RECORDS**

Climax Golden Twins

Dream Cut Short in the Mysterious Clouds

USA MEME MEME018CD CD (2000)

Another richly fascinating and triumphant 'edited, compressed, collaged and distressed' record from the 'Twins', and one which I can't recommend highly enough. Sometimes one wishes that more records could be as adventurous as *Dream Cut Short*, especially those associated with some form of 'underground' scene, but then few creators could manage to create an assemblage that's so schizophrenically fractured as this record. Yet it also retains a complex and focussed sense of beauty. For most intelligent listeners, the immediate impression will hopefully be one of stunned awe. How can they do that?

The internal dreamlogic to this surrealist sequence of music and sounds is all over the place - a labyrinthine roller-coaster ride around some very peculiar corners of the world, with a seasoned eccentric traveller as your guide. It's like discovering a disturbing travelogue film from 1910, scratchy flickering black-and-white images appearing to record impossible events, such as ugly dwarves crawling out of ornate Chinese boxes, and violent variations on the rope trick, or the death of a thousand cuts. There are found tapes, environmental recordings, and tapes subjected to extreme electro-acoustic treatments; there is a species of concentrated electronic minimalism that out-Megoes Florian Hecker. There are brief live performances of unhinged instrumental music (some have compared these to The Magic Band), and samples wrenched from unwilling parent records. There are quiet, drifting drones which suggest infinite space. There are bursts of static, radio interference, and dramatic passages where these are overlaid to portray the gathering of an electric storm. Like kumquats rattling inside a string bag, all these (and more) are segued together with miniature micro-second snippets of odd voices - foreign men whispering, chattering, shouting, singing, breathing, plucking notes from an old piano. Brother, if your senses aren't bewildered after 40 minutes of this kinda LSD-fuelled treatment, then I guess the only thing could satisfy you is a one-way trip to planet Jupiter.

Produced by the Twins and Scott Colburn, the 'house' producer at Abduction Records and sometimes at Anomalous too; although this one's on Meme, most of the Twins output was released (in minuscule quantities) by Fire Breathing Turtle. *Dream Cut Short* is also issued in a limited 500 copy white vinyl press on

Anomalous Records, FBT006. A copy of which immaculate package I also own, and no collector scum is gonna get their filthy paws on it. A fucking gorgeous record.

ED PINSENT

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SWILL RADIO broadcasting from a PRIVATE HAVEN

Three excellent LPs below from Scott Foust and his friends, all related by the Anti-Natural aesthetic.

Idea Fire Company

Anti-Natural

USA SWILL RADIO 018 VINYL LP (ND)

A chilling record. Probably realised on a low budget, but high on intelligence - a suite of fine synthesiser music (with some added tapework and guitars) recorded with a dark edge. Strange drones mixed with passages of illogical playing, realised with a deliberateness and firm commitment to being markedly *different*, without ever once settling for lazy noise-production, or any other modernist cliché. There's a repeating structure, where certain episodes - including an unsettling 'siren' noise - are restated many times, with an insistence bordering on mania. An effective charm; this record could be a black magic spell against the lumpen stupidity of the world.

Idea Fire Company are Karla Borecky and Scott Foust; the latter manages the Swill Radio label out of Amherst. The package comes with a slim leaflet proclaiming the Anti-Natural manifesto. This is a splendid polemic raging against the deadening evils of capitalist consumption, and arguing an idealistic new artistic movement in its place. Requires the total aestheticisation of everything in your life, no less. A very good record indeed. Become an Anti-Natural today!

ED PINSENT

Tart

Radio Orange

USA SWILL RADIO 019 VINYL LP (2000)

Another deeply strange Scott Foust project in the Anti-Natural area. This warped record is excellent and it burns with an underground volcanic force. At the same time it's somewhat more problematic and harder to digest than the Idea Fire Company LP - if that is conceivable. Baffling and perplexing, it sends the listener fairly swiftly into the zone of 'where the devil am I', then sets forth further conundrums. Yes, it's a pack of musical riddles with no answers, nonsensical phrases that seem to defeat themselves.



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Although the opening tracks on sides 1 and 2 are hard hurdles to surmount - disorganised documentary recordings, that might be a drunken guy returning home and rolling marbles across a wooden floor - the remaining music is powerful and of an exceptionally high standard. The long track 'Chopin In A Shell' builds up a compelling mesmerising rhythm out of loops, drum machines, sequencers, noise, keyboards, feedback and assorted detritus. In this relentless and insistent track, a 'motorik' effect is created through loops and synths alone - no drum kit in sight. Mystifying in the best possible way, it suggests the existence of a small pocket of resistance to the ravages of so-called 'civilisation', an unknown urban village whose inhabitants refuse to be reconstructed and retain a sharp, survivor-mentality intelligence. I realise, in saying this, I'm praising the political and intellectual acuity of Foust and his compadres; so be it. I might go so far as to say that the spirit of Faust lives on in Foust, not to say that this record could match one of the 300 or so ideas on *The Faust Tapes* LP. Nor is that Foust's intent. But Tart achieve a similar out-there ness in a naturalistic way, and certainly without ever self-consciously emulating the surface effects of Krautrock (as others have tried).

I'm also haunted and delighted by moments like that on 'The Mums', a lovely organ interlude; the growling, snake-like synth dialogue on 'Astride Such Delicate Pins'; the chilling voice-loops on the title track; and the use of running water as a musical instrument throughout. Tart is Scott Foust, Karla Borecky and Graham Lambkin from The Shadow Ring. This is one fine record. Tune in to Radio Orange today and absorb a dose of Vitamin C for your mind!

ED PINSENT

sees it, these pillars of society can pre-determine our lives even before we're born. 'If It Is A Boy' outlines the limited career choices awaiting anyone unfortunate enough to be born into the benighted United Kingdom.

Over four sides, the cumulative feeling on the listener can be disorienting; it will sap your sense of 'normalcy', coming close to inducing the sensations of drug misuse (I would imagine). Far from being a silly cassette-band racket, this record has been arranged, composed and performed with great deliberation; every wobble and drop-out on the tape adds to the compositional process. There is intelligence here, a highly developed political and artistic aesthetic, and even a warped sense of humour. I'd love to spend a weekend in the company of these guys, but cheaper by far to buy this record. It's better than Therapy. This is art-therapy, in the Anti-Naturals style.

ED PINSENT

All Swill Radio releases from:

PO Box 9401, North Amherst, MA 01059-0401, USA

The Shadow Ring

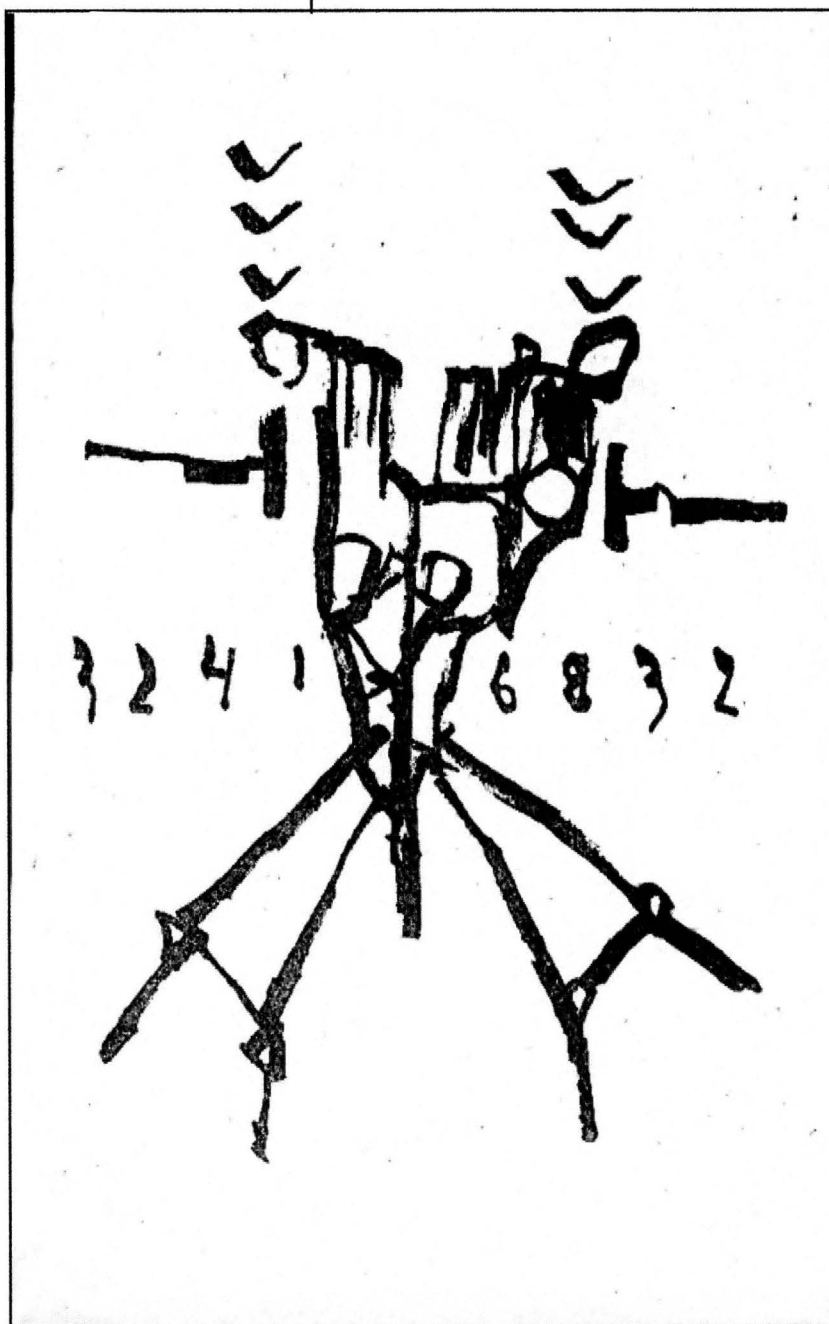
Lighthouse

USA SWILL RADIO 017 VINYL 2 x LP
(1999)

A stunning double LP of experimental electronics and oddball poetry. The poetry is spoken mostly by Graham Lambkin, an English writer who intones his clever deadpan surrealist words, miked in such a way he appears to be speaking into a plastic cup. Scott Foust, Karla Borecky, Adris Hoyos (from Monostadt 3) join the core members Darren Harris, Graham Lambkin, Tim Goss; they all contribute electronics, tapes, piano, percussion and studio manipulation in a group effort even more outlandish than the Tart / Idea Fire Company releases above. The more players in the team, the stronger they become.

The dynamics they achieve in their group playing are astonishingly bold and striking. This seems to have involved a serious re-thinking and rebuilding of what it means to be in a band. The playing is enigmatic, almost inconsequential; a simply stated two-note melody here, an aimless electronic doodle there. The instrumentation is mostly rather minimal, rarely more than two or three sounds going at once - leaving the poet plenty of space to move. Not that he needs it, as he leaves just as many mystifying gaps as they do. These spare combinations result in a stark overall sound to *Lighthouse*, each contribution stands alone, naked, in the centre of a bleak empty room.

Certain recurrent themes are clearly discernible among the voice parts of these 24 tracks; King Arthur's one recurrent figure, and along with the Vikings walking into Britain suggest a mythical / distant past of the UK which should not be forgotten. The writer shows this history bleeding into the present-day. He is also preoccupied with 'establishment' organisations, including the Royal Air Force, The British Embassy, and most tellingly the Royal National Lifeboat Institute. (The RNLI references crop up in many places, including on 'I am a Lighthouse' a lyric filled with stark maritime images of lonely fishermen and stranded boats.) As he



"I felt like to listen in myself"

Koji Asano interview

BY ED PINSENT

Works by this young Japanese composer and performer started arriving at this magazine last year. It was after the arrival of the four CD set *As The Last Shade Of Evening Falls* that it became clear this fellow was a significant musician. I wanted to know a bit more.

Although this interview is brief, Koji provides distilled information. The brevity is due probably to Koji's elliptical way of expressing himself; and the sort of genuine modesty you find among the Japanese, which renders excess of verbiage superfluous.

Koji's musical works are equally elliptical, although their duration is long; they are as long as they need to be.

This interview took place by e-mail over March-April 2001.

EP How did you come from Japan to Barcelona?

KA Inspiration.

I really like to move and change the place for [where I] live and compose.

Right after graduating High school in Japan, I moved to London because I wanted to see if the place makes [a] change [of] any kind of inspiration for composing.

I started composing first with only Piano when I was 13, then with guitars, bands, synthesizers, tapes until [I was] 18.

[At] those ages, I really composed [a] lot, and that was only way to learn and evolve my compositions.

Then one day, it seemed that there's nothing [left] to compose in same location and environment, in hometown. [This change] brought me to another country.

Most early CDs were done in Tokyo while I lived there 6 years after London. But also my 7th (*You can't open the door because it's already open*) and 8th (*Vacant Land*) albums were composed in Moscow when I was touring and staying in Russia for two months in 1997. All since 13th albums were made in Barcelona.

EP Is Spain now your permanent HQ?

Now from my window, I can see artwork by Gaudi. There are lots of art here in Barcelona, like Picasso or Miro, but for me [the] most inspired thing [about] living in this town is its weather. The colour of the sky, the dawn, the sunset is marvellously incredible. Whole week of heavy rains which smells fantastic during turning point of seasons. Also the sky of my home town where I grew up in the countryside of Japan was very clear in winter night. They always give me full motivation to make music.

I don't know how long I will be in Spain. I think I will be here until my composition needs thick clouds, in North country.



especially with caring [about] the importance of releasing by order. [A] musician cares about its order of tracks in CD but I do care also about the order of album [releases], as well as the track. That's why I always put the number in back jacket.

My music requires to [be] released [in a] certain order, like next notes.

Additionally I couldn't just wait for even [a] few months.

I wanted to release my first CD work, to go to next door [step] as soon as possible.

That's my problem, but at the same time it makes me prolific.

I really couldn't leave the piece on DAT or CDR until someone decide to launch.

EP Do you do everything solo, or have you ever collaborated with other musicians?

KA On 3rd and 12th release, I worked with other musicians. On 3rd, *Gravity*, I worked with Drums played by Hisashi Nagata and Keyboard by Isao Otake. I composed.

On 12th, playing with Violin by Tomomi Tokunaga, Viola by Ai Tashiro, Contrabass by Kentaro Suzuki, Cello by Mayumi Yamaoka, and Piano by Isao Otake. I composed.

For me composing is so special personal thing. So I can't imagine [that] I [would] work with composer like some groups. Even doing the concert like live session, it's hard to do recently. I mean, I'm used to playing with musicians like jam session but the results were always nothing, and I felt myself so empty, like I couldn't go anywhere after all. I almost hate to improvise with someone. On the other hand, I have my small string ensemble in Tokyo, (like above) so, working with players are very important. I want to work as much as possible with players with my composition. In October 2001, I'm requested to compose new orchestra piece for Banda Municipal de Barcelona (an orchestra group in Barcelona). It's always so excited to write scores for orchestra, ensemble, solo or anything.

EP What releases are there before you started your own record label? Eg there's at least one release on the RAB label from Japan...called Solstice!

KA RAB is same as Solstice, that was my label. Later I changed the name to SOLSTICE, and all together, now 20 CDs.

Before I run the label by myself, of course I was looking for the label to release [my work], around 1994, but soon I realized that it takes time to find out for such [an] unknown composer and many label has its own strong colour for its marketing.

Since my output has [been] widely prolific, I thought that no label can handle them all,

The Sound 9projector Ninth Issue 2001

EP Has your work been getting progressively more simple over time, or has it always been very basic?

KA Getting better over time.

EP Can you say something about the simplicity of your music? Did you start out complicated, then become simpler?

KA As simple as early-summer sunshine. But the sharp sunshine of early summer is also complicated. In a sense, my CD albums are now becoming simpler than before in terms of tracks. My early albums contain several tracks but now it's only one track, just a whole album.

From the beginning, I was concentrating to make CD from one single sound-source / instrument or material. That time I needed some separate tracks to construct a story, but [for the last] one or two years it [reverted] to one long piece. As I mentioned before, I consider an album as a track which construct whole thing. Probably that's the simplicity of my music.

EP What methods of music production are you interested in: composition, electro-acoustic, tape manipulation, electronic synthesis, pure noise / feedback, computer processing?

KA For me above all are same, doing music.

I don't know yet how I [will] make music in [my] next album. I'm interested in any method which produce sound wave to make music. In other words, probably I'm not interested much in any [single] method. Just like I'm not interested in someone else's way to make music.

EP Cover photographs / artworks suggest you are very interested in a precise sense of location. Is this reflected in the music? What defines this? Is the music intended as an extension of the environment?

KA No, it's not reflection or extension. Cover photos and words (titles) are basically not concerned with music, and there's no so-called concept, either. But photos, title and music are linked.

EP Do you find places can be special in some way?

KA I believe Places can be special. All places in my covers are all special places in many countries for me.

EP What makes them special for you?

KA Because it became CD cover. It wasn't special place when I took photos, I just didn't notice. But later I realized it, when [it] all comes together, music, title and photos. I think they are belonging to or linked to same point.

EP Do you do live performances, or do you prefer the studio?

KA Recently I'm trying to do many live performances because I want to concentrate only short minutes to create in real time. Studio and live are completely different world for me. So, live music [works] are quite different from CD works. In studio, the time seems like forever.

EP You are very prolific. Is it very easy for you to make music?

KA I'm prolific, but I don't think it's easy.

Prolificness is one of my way to make new music.

Composing is so fun. Probably it's not [a question of] being easy or difficult to do.

But I can say it's difficult to live, if I don't do music.

I remember when I first composed. I used to listen [to] music all the time in my home when I was child, and suddenly one day, I couldn't find a record which I felt like to listen in myself, so [I thought] why not I make it by myself? Then I composed my first piece in my life.

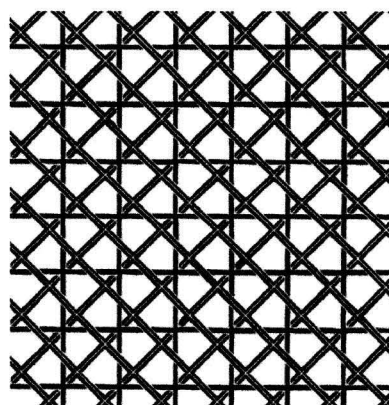
I want to listen to some music which is fresh in some sense for me. So my composition has to be always fresh for me. These years I became to make 2 or 3 CD titles at the same time and mostly I got idea or new music-wise from current project. It's all continuing. I complete the works because I want to move on [to a] new album. Each album which I [have] done is like my rival. Because I'm hoping to make something [more] wonderful than past.

EP Is duration of the work very important to you?

KA Yes. I like short pieces but recently my albums are only one track [lasting] more than one hour. Because long duration needs more energy and concentrated time to build up whole music.

EP That sounds like there is good deal of preparation time before you actually make the music. How do you build up the energy you need? How do you concentrate time in that way?

KA I think, when I compose something, because [then] it's [the] proper time to happen to work with it. Something is still sinking somewhere in deep in my mind, or something is just vanishing, some [things] are changing. So I just compose that [way], when something comes up on surface, I just take it very naturally. I can't really ignore them. All depends on the issue, something takes very long time to show up and something are not.



As you pointed out, it would need the energy to build up whole album. I do very often swimming. I have to be in studio many days in a row, although it's unhealthy. For my composition, simply, working out is quite necessary. Although I don't compose in the pool or gym, that's the way to keep my brain connected to real world.

EP What areas of the human psyche are you interested in: spiritual contemplation, dreams, time disruption, unusual states of mind, memory / nostalgia?

KA For me, making music is like taking over all these psyche things.

EP Do you mean you aim to control your own state of mind, or that of others? What do you dream about? What memories do you have?

KA Composing a piece is like walking around my own forest. There, I myself even don't know what will happen or what kind of things live there. Music is just my way to take over anything or convert them. So I don't dream at all, I don't need to care much about memories directly. Because I'm replacing them all, by doing music. So if I don't have this way, surely I would dream or anything to replace.

EP Does the surface of the sound hold more interest to you than the content of the music?

KA If surface is more important for me, it's very easy to make music. And duration and position doesn't make sense. When I'm composing one hour piece, it must be rich content of story which needs one hour to explain or tell.

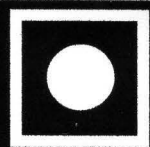
EP So, what does this require from the listener? One hour to listen, or several days' contemplation, to reach an understanding?

KA I want to keep away from my works after I [have] released [them]. I don't require anything from listener. You can understand as you feel, just as well as I do to my music. We are equal. But if you didn't [arrive at] finding interests in piece, probably I would propose [for you] to listen to it some years later again. Because it happened to me sometimes.

Basically I'm not interested at all to listen to my previous works, however, when I do it I could sometimes find new side which I didn't notice when I composed that time.

KOJI ASANO DISCOGRAPHY on SOLSTICE RECORDS 1995-2000

- 1 Solstice
- 2 Caffeine
- 3 Gravity
- 4 Pheromone
- 5 Celeste
- 6 Fret
- 7 You can't open the door because it's already open
- 8 Vacant Land
- 9 Sunshine filtering through foliage
- 10 Monsoon
- 11 Avalanches
- 12 Flow-Augment
- 13 Preparing For April
- 14 Momentum
- 15 A Secret Path Of Rain
- 16 The Last Shade of Evening Falls 1/4
- 17 The Last Shade of Evening Falls 2/4
- 18 The Last Shade of Evening Falls 3/4
- 19 The Last Shade of Evening Falls 4/4
- 20



VINYL VIANDS

●●●●● The Black Stuff ●●●●●

By Ed Pinsent

BEEN MINDFUL OF THE FACT THAT THIS MAG used to feature old and rare records, not just new releases. So, at the risk of coming over like some shallow pickaninny or collecting-fop, here's a random rummage through thirty vinyl purchases I made in the last several months. At first it was going to be a selection of the stuff I thought would *impress* you in some way - oh, what a well-informed tasteful purchaser I must be. Instead, for better or worse, it seemed more honest to own up to virtually everything and anything I had swooped upon, magpie fashion, as is my wont when I grub around in filthy second-hand shops and dingy record fairs, or sit at home with a pen circling titles on collectors' lists. I used to go to record fairs quite a lot, not so much any more now. It was not a healthy habit. But then, neither is staying indoors and ordering stuff from rare lists. In the interests of some form of social history, a mention is sometimes made of prices, and where and how I got these stupid slabs of vinyl - mostly from record shops in London, natch. If you require any further information about any of these records, feel free to pester me and see how far you get. This is just a superficial bit of stream-of-consciousness, and not proper 'reviews'. Ptoeey!

The Globe Unity Orchestra and The Choir of the NDR-Broadcast Hamburg '74 GERMANY FMP 0650

Very nice. Free European jazz with a German radio choir! Talk about your rich sonorities - enough to make you vomit. It's fucking bonkers. How many people were doing records like this in 1974? I tell you, that fucking Peter Brötzmann is a maniac. Not only for masterminding all of these superb FMP releases, and designing the sleeves with his cool typography, but for playing his heart and lungs out on stage every night. He might just be the most important man in the universe. This one is a composition by Alex Schlippenbach, and features UK players Kenny Wheeler, Derek Bailey, Paul Rutherford and Evan Parker, with Han Bennink and all the other European free jazz loons. Got this from Ray's Jazz. All the FMP vinyl was thrown into a skip when they decided to repress the catalogue on CD. I've heard that stupid story I don't know how many times. If you can't shift the stock, then frankly it makes sense to ditch it rather than pay expensive storage costs. The only people who tell me that story are record dealers and collectors, who are distressed at the thought of all that potential loot going into the dumpster. Well...you know, when I look at the extortionate prices charged for these records, sometimes I'm glad it happened!



Dislocation Coyote's Call USA FUSETRON FUSE015

Totally fucked up Japanese free jazz record. When they decide to emulate a genre of music the Japanese don't do it by halves. There was a good CD on Scatter a few years ago, but this is the real stuff. Grinds away your common sense with blurtish sax noise, mixed freely with insane electronics. Got this from Phil Todd's list.

Magma Magma FRANCE PHILIPS 6395 001 002

Sheesh! Their first double LP on French Philips label and I got this for ten bones! Christian Vander's utterly maniacal jazz-rock group arrived in the 1970s with a message - a very unpalatable message about dark forces overtaking the world, as typified by the claw on the front cover crushing an entire city full of screaming people. Brilliant! No wonder Chris Cutler liked

them - probably he saw it as another metaphor of Capitalism. Very sci-fi, but much more rooted in some form of reality than Heldon. Certainly better than Rick Wakeman. I only make that connection due to Gareth Williams' story...

John Fahey Volume 3: The Dance of Death and Other Plantation Favourites USA TAKOMA RECORDS TAK-7004

Undoubtedly a late repress of his 1967 LP. But I don't 'need' originals. All his early records are fantastic and indispensable. Acoustic guitar genius of the first water and utterly original. The blues influence was what interested me more than anything. Now I realise Fahey is a total American original, not some revival copyist, with plenty of twisted ideas of his own. This one contains 'Worried Blues', a variant of the great tune originally recorded by Frank Hutchison in the 1920s. Hutchison was a white coal-mining musician and made some glorious records now reckoned as all-time classics of American Folk. Proof that, as someone once told me, black and white music did not evolve separately. Frank's take on the blues is astonishing, as Fahey's reincarnation of it will tell you. Forget where I got this one. Excellent Dance of Death engraving on the cover.

**Conlon
Nancarrow
Complete Studies
for Player Piano:
The Music of
Conlon Nancarrow
Volume Three**

USA 1750 ARCH RECORDS
S-1786

His work is out on CD, but only the Wergo recordings which frankly ain't so hot. It's these recordings you need, on the 1750 ARCH RECORDS label. I have another volume in this series and both are red-hot. If you ain't hip to the Nanster, he was a crazy maverick American composer who produced most of his work for the pianola, the player-piano. Not content with this, he would punch out the paper rolls to make these players work and do it all himself, by hand! Just think of him working out there in the garage with his set of chisels. Natch, it would take months just to generate a few minutes of music, but he didn't care. I think there's a project to rescue all of his decaying rolls, using computer technology. In the meantime, check out this demented boogie-woogie music and weep. He makes those instruments perform runs and rolls they sure were not designed to do, on a par with Keith Emerson's abuse of the Moog. Impossibly fast and embodying the 'superhuman' qualities of speed and endurance he was after. Human performers were never up to the task. This is from a rare book catalogue list. A bookseller who mainly sells Beat literature and avant-garde shit.

**S Core
Missing Volume**
USA ZABRISKIE POINT
POINT 17

Pure and simple - industrial vacuum-cleaner NOISE. A record to play with the window open so you can terrify small children passing by, who ride on their daddies' shoulders. This one is by a Japanese soloist who will never be as great as Merzbow, but that's why we love him anyway. I last used this instead of a shampoo, and my hair stayed clean for days. From Phil Todd's fine catalogue.



Stockhausen

Opus 1970
GERMANY DEUTSCHE
GRAMMOPHON SLPM 139
461

Shit! I've been buying Stocky like there's no tomorrow of late. But I'm glad I got this one. With all the interest in sampling and deconstruction of ownership yatta yatta yatta, you'da thunk the world and his brother would be copying this album for its ruthless massacre of the works of fucking Beethoven. Along with piano and gong and whatnot, Stocky lays into this work with a determined but quietly relentless violence. There's nothing like a healthy dose of paranoid envy between artists to generate great art. Maybe Stockhausen thought he could supplant Ludwig Von as 'the' German composer. Beethoven leaks into the electro-acoustic mess in fragments, like the ghost he always was. Hate to tell you what a philistine I am. When it comes to classical music I like it only two ways. Very early - up to about Thomas Tallis will do me fine - then nothing until the 20th century, when it gets interesting again. Stockhausen records in London are fetching stupidly high prices, esp at the Record and Tape exchange. Someone slipped up though and I got this at the Camden Town

branch for £14. It also has the original HMV SHOPS sticker denoting it as Price Code H. Probably about 99p in real terms!

**C.C.C.C.
Live In Pittsburgh**

An unofficial LP from a period when this Jap noise crew were still quiet, and manageable. Later in their career they went a bit insane volume-wise. No wonder Seymour Glass loved 'em. This is far from chaotic noisy evil, but a sustained and long droning of processed feedback which soon went out of style when everyone realised they could do that too. But they also realised nobody else could do it quite like these guys. From 1992. From a rare list.

Negativland

First LP
USA SEELAND RECORDS
001

Fantastic! Bizarre noises and lots of advert voice samples. When this stuff was brand new in 1980 there seemed to be a point to it. But recently I saw the movie about all this stuff and it made me ill. I mean, those guys can be so self-righteous when they get onto a political kick. But they're

so naive. What I like about this rec is it sounds so strange and makes no sense whatsoever, no matter how often you play it. After this, who knows which way they went, but at least they had their glorious moment of true subversiveness. With a sleeve covered with cut-outs from magazines, and wallpaper. From a rare list. Not cheap in this or any other state. Don't believe the limited pressing hype, there were a lot of copies of this record around!

**Chrome
Half Machine Lip
Moves**

UK BEGGARS BANQUET
BEGA 18

Used to own a copy of this in 1982, then stupidly got rid of it. Now bought the same Beggars Banquet reissue again. Nowhere near as bleak as I remember it to be. Very decent and nasty drum-machine plus electronic music, filled with images of urban alienation and despair. They have an enormous catalogue and Helios Creed has made not a few solo records, but I gather this is the one to own. From 1980.

Stockhausen

Spiral
GERMANY WERGO SHZW
903 BL

A brilliant bad-tempered piece of electronic fuck-you music on side one, augmented by the Blockflöte of Michael Vetter. A magnificently monstrous studio work from 1969. The flip-side is a Klavierstück extract, one of those very quiet piano works which never grabbed me somehow. Odd - a Stocky release on the Wergo label, part of the Hor Zu Black Label series that included releases by Ligeti, Vanilla Fudge and The Steve Miller Band. I kid you not. Mad sleeve design with a Danish Pastry on the cover! Why? From the bookdealer's list.

**Sunny Murray
Sunny Murray**
ESP DISK 1032

Oh a great LP fer sure. Not an original ESP, this is the Base Record reissue, though even those are growing scarce nowadays. With Alan Silva and Jacques Coursil, this kinda prefigures the great things that

were to come on the BYG label. With a cover of Albert Ayler's Angels and Devils too. From Honest Jon's, who continue to bung out these Base reissues at about £7.99 apiece. Now of course the ESP catalogue - having failed on the German ZYX label on CD, is in the hands of Get Back records, along with the BYG catalogue.

Henry Kuntz **Ancient Of Days,** **Light Of Glory** USA HUMMING BIRD RECORDS HB 1002

Unusual solo saxophone independent release. Kuntz is intensely annoying on the soprano sax, playing very high-pitched squeaky repetitive noise, and could see off Evan Parker any day in a contest. Described as a record of 'free-form ritual music' and packaged in a silk-screened sleeve. Recorded at the Finger Palace in 1980. A vague Henry Kaiser connection, but you don't wanna know about it. From the rare list, where its anti-social qualities were praised.

Biota **Rackabones** USA DYS 12 & 13

This double LP comes complete with arty prints by The Mnemonists, another band partially related to this unusual noise-making collective combo. Was carried in the Recommended catalogue for years and nobody gave a darn. Enter another world through their art and music - excessively baroque it may be, but filled with the opulence and richness that only Americans can offer. From These Records, who had a little supply of them for a while.

Ornette Coleman **Crisis** USA ABC RECORDS AS- 9187

Splendid recording of a 1969 concert, with Ornette on violin and sax joined by the all-time talents of Don Cherry, Dewey Redman, Charlie Haden, and son Denardo Coleman on the drums! Although sold to us as some kind of protest record - the Constitution is in flames on the cover, and there's a track called 'Song for Che' - Ornette is just too nice a guy to really mean this shit, not in the same

way the Archie Shepp and other black panther motherfuckers who would have taken you apart if you just looked at 'em wrong. This is I assume an ABC reissue of an Impulse rarity. Dated 1972. From Honest Jon's in Portobello Road.

concrete poetry. I've tried getting 'into' this zone because it sounded so interesting. I bought a few books. The stuff is incomprehensible to me. There was an international movement and it changed the way poetry was perceived forever. I think what I like more than anything is the typesetting. I've tried to rip



Kick That Habit SWITZERLAND UHLANG- PRODUKTION 05

It's Voice Crack under any other name, doing what they do best - and thankfully in very short bursts. Just kidding. How I love their brand of all-out electronic noise. A live recording from 1986, God bless us. On the Swiss equivalent of Recommended, in an elaborate fold-out sleeve decorated with strange images of sportsmen with rifles. From rare list.

Experiments in **Disintegrating** **Language /** **Konkrete Canticle** UK THE ARTS COUNCIL OF GREAT BRITAIN AC 1971

A real oddity here. Bob Cobbing and his pals on an astonishing and important document of

off a few ideas from the books and put them into the magazine. This LP makes no sense whatsoever, but it's great to listen to - extremely disjunctive, insane texts and a very bizarre style of noise-making feeds into the reading. The ideas deserve more exploration than I will attempt here. Got this from Bob Cobbing himself, at his London home and from his private stock. He was offering it for £5. Feeling guilty, I gave him twice that and suggested he keep the change. No use bluffing a man of his wisdom and years. He told me he's seen it offered at £100. It was the only LP record ever issued by the [British] Arts Council, who now completely deny that they did so. There is nothing in the archive to prove it. Well, this exists and refute it if you dare.



Musique pour **Ondes Martenot** FRANCE TEPPAZ LYON 245.001

A French ten-incher from vintage years. Absolutely beautiful. The only trouble is that it dates from less enlightened times when composers and inventors alike thought that they best way forward for electronic instruments was forcing them to play classical music. The same misguided thinking blighted the progress of the Theremin. It's a nice choice of unusual classical music here, but it's still classical music, which I mostly detest if I'm honest. Nelly Caron is the soloist. Has a 'nostalgic' sound, because they don't record things in the studio like this any more. Lovely sleeve. The typo for the label alone is worth the price I paid for this. From the same avant bookdealer as above.

Moondog in **Europe** **Managarm** GERMANY KOPF RRF 33014

One of the overlooked Moondog masterpieces, his CBS LPs being fairly common. Since the death of this great man it's about time we all re-evaluated his lovely music. Many CDs are available. This one is done mostly on the organ, with added strings and horns and percussion by Moondog. Although he was a real swinger, totally informed by jazz composition and with street smarts spilling out of his boots, this eccentric blind genius still felt compelled to prove he could match the European notion of what 'real' composition was. I love this stuff, but for me you can't get better than Moondog playing a reed instrument or recorder and 'jamming' with the Staten Island Ferry as it blew its siren every evening. From Record and Tape exchange and only £14. Another stupid slip on their part.

Morricone **Revolver** **soundtrack** ITALY DAGORED RED 112-1

Dagored in Italy are doing a great job reissuing many a Morricone soundtrack on HEAVY vinyl and with gatefold



sleeves decorated with brilliant cinematic images. Intoxica! on Portobello Road where I bought this were having a field day with these, probably very appealing to the shiny young things who frequent their shop and scoop up the exotica and kitsch rarities which adorn their walls. This Morricone probably isn't the one to get if you want a bit of variety, as it's effectively one main theme restated many times, but with some excellent anxiety-inducing filler cues. The original film starred Oliver Reed. I have not seen it, but I don't have access to Turner Classic Movies. I wish I did, sometimes.

Evan Parker
Zanzou
JAPAN JAZZ AND NOW
RECORDS 1

A nice rare one from when Evan took his sax to Japan in 1982 and blew his notes in solo mode to devastating effect. Derek Bailey also went to Japan, but at a different time and for different reasons. Back cover photo is the wonderful image of two Jap kids holding their ears as smiling Evan blasts a harsh toot on his soprano sax. From Ray's Jazz and at a very nice price too I must say.

The Slits
Typical Girls
ISLAND RECORDS 12 WIP
6505

A nice old single from 1979 from this infamous all-girl band. Never went a bundle on this band except for 'Animal Space', which I liked and bought partly because of I girl I loved once - but that's another story. Maybe I should have got more 'into' The Slits, if you get my meaning, because they were real English eccentrics and peddled some decent ideas. OK, this one might be something of a cliché, a record that questions the mass-marketed images of 'boy meets girl' we're sold constantly, but this is but one reflection of the critical edge that has now all but vanished from pop music. If The Slits were an important index of feminism in music, then what price yer Spice Girls and Girl Power in the 1990s? So many girls in pop music now are mere pawns in selling the 'typical girl' image. Whatever, this is another fine single that displays interest in dub (and how many people weren't into it in the 1970s I ask) with a Dennis Bovell remix. I'm not sure if he ever completely 'got' The Slits, but then what do I know - I'm not sure I 'get' anything to do with girls. Certainly not sex, at any rate.

Joe McPhee
The Willisau
Concert
SWITZERLAND HAT HUT
RECORDS B

A splendid live date from 1975. McPhee is one of the most overlooked tenor players ever - he also plays soprano - but here's a very decent release on the Swiss Hat Hut label when they were still worth a darn. They put on some corkers by Cecil Taylor and Sun Ra and Albert Ayler in their heyday. Their CDs seem a bit dull in comparison. I think they were just starting out here. There's a great insert which suggests he made four LPs for 'em, I have two including this one. His earlier records (mostly College dates) were on CJR Productions, starting with *Underground Railroad* in 1969. Impossible to describe this music, but you will like it if you like any decent free jazz in the Coleman - Cherry - Ayler mode. With John Snyder (a white guy with a ponytail) on the synthesiser and Makay Utsoho on the drums. From mail order list, though has turned up at Honest Jon's.

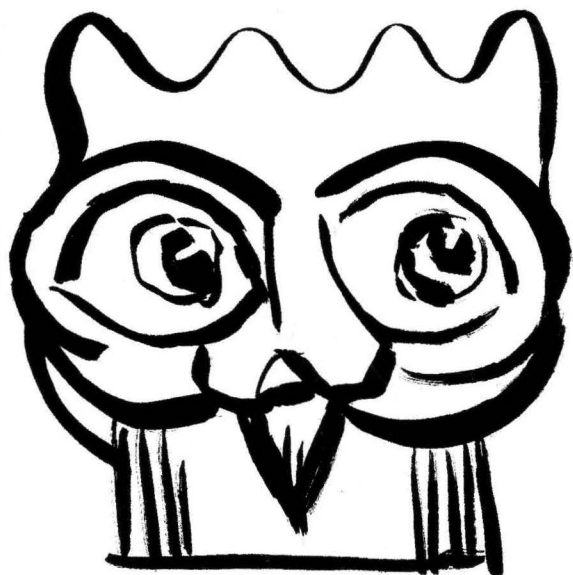
Nektar
A Tab in The Ocean
UK UNITED ARTISTS UAG
29499

A minor Krautrock band perhaps, but still worth a darn - much more like progressive rock than some of the more experimental and electronic bands, which I suppose is why

they were signed to United Artists (along with Can and Neu!). This is from 1972 and recorded at the famous Dieter Dierks studio. The title track is a side-long meisterwerk, which opens with the lyric 'Climb Aboard imaginary waves of thought beneath the veils of bluey green...' suggesting the label was trying to sell this LP to the Genesis audience in the UK. The cover painting and collage doesn't deny this possibility. Actually very good stuff indeed. Lots of great Hammond organ. I liked this ever since I first saw the cover in the *Album Cover Album* book. Somehow I always knew I would eventually own it. So good to finally hear it.

Scott Walker
Climate of Hunter
UK VIRGIN RECORDS
V2303

Even Scott fans find it hard to stomach this one, the 1984 LP that came out in the wilderness between the mid 1990s 'comeback' of *Tilt* and *Nite Flights*, the late 1970s Walker Brothers LP that had 'The Shutout' and 'The Electrician'. I suspect it must have sold abysmally. I well remember copies turning up for 50p and lower at Record and Tape Exchange. Then one evening I was riding in a cab with Donald Miller (not a normal occurrence in my life, I hasten to add) and he was asking me if I knew how to contact Scott Walker. Didn't I realise, he was raving in exasperation, that Evan Parker played on the *Climate of Hunter*



LP? I thought this was absurd, and assumed the old fart must have been bullshitting me, but was intrigued enough to look at a copy to find out if he was right.

Well, Evan's on here all right. Turns out Scott and Evan are old mates and Evan played at Scott Walker's Meltdown festival at the South Bank for old time's sake. Of course, Mark Knopfler is here too, but that's showbiz - you gotta take the rough with the smooth. Or vice versa, in this case. I admit that I'm bowled over by the 1960s Scott LPs - it was a boon to get them all reissued on CD - sentimental and wordy though they be, and they sound like Radio Two music used to sound. I try my best to keep up with the later stuff. His vocal range isn't what it used to be - most of the *Climate of Hunter* tracks find him vamping around a few notes, while the orchestra and the band add drama through poignant chord changes. But the added depth comes with the obscurity of his extremely poetic lyrics, which verge on the impenetrable. I like this, because it means I can keep coming back to this record and finding new clues every time. I never play *Tilt* on a regular basis, but again this is proof I think of how profound it probably is.

Kevin Ayers Joy of A Toy / Shooting At The Moon UK HARVEST HERITAGE SHDW 407

The Harvest Heritage double LP with new cover artwork, for which I still remember seeing a full-page advert in the *Melody Maker*. These are his indispensable 1969 and 1970 LPs. I have never heard such genius compressed into perfect avant-pop songs of brevity and economy, and with such great players too. Here's something which only the English can do, and we should be more proud of it than we are - I mean the whimsical and fey attempt at jazz, and playing that allows pure parochialism and sentiment to drive the music. It comes over quaint as heck, but who cares? It is unique. Besides this we have Ayers' brilliant lyrics, suffused with Alice in Wonderland styled imagery and other stabs at nostalgia, and his bass-voice delivery which affects this mannered deliberation within the phrasing. How did I neglect

this one for so long? Now I can't live without it. Still, I'm comforted by the fact that it took American 'hipsters' until the mid 1980s to catch onto Ayers. And so many other things besides. Featuring great English players from his former band The Soft Machine, also David Bedford, Lol Coxhill and, erm, Mike Oldfield. Undoubtedly two of Mark Kramer's favourite records.



Streetwalkers Downtown Flyers UK VERTIGO 6360 123

Another one I remember from a 1975 *Melody Maker* advert. With so many records, or experiences, generally, there's a single *image* that gets to me one way or another and ends up filed away in a distant part of my mental filing system, only to be retrieved at some later date when the 'trigger' is provided. Streetwalkers were a bloody excellent English rock unit that have yet to be properly 'rediscovered', even in an age where everyone knows everything. Roger Chapman (the mad vocalist from Family) and Charlie Whitney on guitars were the nucleus; they had at least one 'hit' with 'Burlesque' which I recall seeing performed on TOTP, and I bought the Red Card LP in the 1970s. Still own that. Later I got Family Bandstand from an Oxfam shop in Allerton Road in Liverpool. This is just dandy too. Great greasy fish and chips rock supplemented with keyboard tracks from guest session players. The guitars are treated with loads of phase and reverb. Fine production and a solid sound you just don't get anymore. With a fine sexist gatefold sleeve where the band are dwarfed by gigantic airbrushed women with high heels and short skirts and no

panties on underneath. Which, for some reason, is the image I remember as described above.

Archie Shepp Pitchin Can FRANCE AMERICA RECORDS 30 AM 6106

Awp! An outstanding 1969 session from this blackest and meanest of the free jazz mo-fos. A two-part composition called 'Uhuru (Dawn of Freedom)' shows a large combo beating and playing their hearts out, in order to claim and hold onto political emancipation through totally free art. Hearing this, you thought maybe they could win, and it's too bad it turned out otherwise. A small army of great names on here: Bobby Few, Bob Reid, Clifford Thornton, Mohamed Ali, Al Shorter, Lester Bowie, Sonny Murray, Noah Howard, Leroy Jenkins, Dave Burrell, Earl Freeman and more...some of them play on the long piece, others play on the title cut composed by Cal Massey and recorded at the Black Gypsy sessions. Incredible ensemble playing. A weird French label this, that put out free jazz LPs I suppose in the wake of the BYG Actuel releases. A real scoop.

Alternative TV Vibing Up The Senile Man UK DEPTFORD FUN CITY RECORDS DLP03

Another excellent LP that nobody seems to want in the house. Every you go you see it marked down in price. Mark Perry and Dennis Burns surely deserve their place in the sun one day, what with this and The Door And The Window. Incredibly bleak songs and stories set forth by brilliantly played lo-fi bleak new wave music. Was a bit put off at first, but now realise this is a major part of English 1970s culture. And you can bet your life it never featured on the BBC vision of I LOVE 1978. This was

recommended to all and sundry by a Wire correspondent in the letters page, who tried to 'clinch' the deal by pointing out that Genesis P-Orridge plays percussion on it. Oddly enough, that's the one feature that puts me off it.

Steeleye Span Please To See The King USA BIG TREE RECORDS BTS 2004

Everyone hates this lot too, but more fool those who do - just because they became commercially successful perhaps. A fantastic folk-rock record from their early phase. Maddy Prior and Tim Hart know almost as much about the UK's folk music heritage as Shirley Collins. Here they are with Martin Carthy, Ashley Hutchings and Peter Knight - so what is there to complain about? Gorgeous harmony vocals, crisp arrangements and spirited scraping and bowing. John Bagnall taped two of the best cuts for me - 'The Blacksmith' and 'Boys of Bedlam', which I played to my mum on her car stereo while driving through the Norfolk countryside on our trip to Bickling Hall. Beautiful. For some reason however I've wound up with an American pressing on the Big Tree Records label. The absurdities of life are not mine to question.



Let me know if you have enjoyed this column and I will gladly lead you through another superficial rummage through the dusty corners of my collection.



Telepathic

M•A•G•I•C

CHARLES HAYWARD



AAAAAAA

BADABADABA



TELEPATHIC MAGIC

Interview with Charles Hayward by Ed Pinsent

TELEVISION. WE ALL KNOW IT'S BAD for us, but how many of us have taken the radical step of getting rid of the one-eyed monster once and for all? Charles Hayward did. His kids didn't know what was happening until everyone came home from a family holiday and found the TV missing. Hayward had disposed of it at the last minute, pretending to go back and lock the front door. He knows enough about the enemy to recognise two of the big-name threats: soap operas like *Eastenders*, and daytime talk shows like Geraldo and Rikki.

TV shows are getting louder, more insistent, brasher and above all - more invasive. The shows are demanding, trying to occupy every second of your time. More than that, they are trying to steal your time, and replace it with inane, timewasting trivia. What's worse is the shows that pretend to have something to do with real life, such as fictional soap operas addressing 'real issues', or talk shows made up of 'real people' braying and screeching at each other. The common element to these shows is their sensationalism. The writers of *Brookside*, and the hosts of Oprah Winfrey style shows, will try and tell you they are interested in initiating a discourse, opening up a debate on sensitive issues. As if! To begin with there IS no discourse possible through television, because it's entirely one-way; you only see and hear what they allow you to, and your only option is to shout back at an unhearing screen. Secondly, these shows are exclusively interested in fomenting conflict and controversy - controversy generated by the rape and murder of fictional characters, or hordes of big-mouthed American white trash idiots screaming at each other - because that's what boosts the ratings, grabs audiences, and makes for 'good television'. There is no real interest in a dialogue, in resolving the issues, or helping us to become a better society. There is only a prurient desire to shock, to titillate, and to keep us watching.

Thirdly, there's a deliberate decontextualising of everything. The disconnected nature of television (which is what Oliver Stone's *Natural Born Killers* was trying, very badly, to communicate to us) means that these potentially important issues are cut adrift, with no connective tissue, floating in a 'sea of bullshit' (see below) that places us in the impossible position of trying and sort it out. If you think I'm exaggerating, just watch any lead-in trailer to a show on Carlton, and you'll be bombarded with micro-second fragments of violent imagery in amongst adverts for chocolate, meaningless melting graphics, and a booming soundtrack that makes the subliminal horror-noises in *The Exorcist* seem tame!

Television seeps a pernicious sort of acid that dissolves the fabric of communities. Charles Hayward believes in society, the community. He's found one in Deptford, South London, and not only is he an active part of it, he has found ways to transform it too, through an iterative programme of music and education. He works extensively with the learning disabled, and far from being some right-on patronising social worker (he despises political correctness), he tends to see disabled people as possessing a key to the genetic code, and acting as potential torch-bearers for the next generation. On the single day I met Hayward at a Chinese restaurant and on the walk to his rehearsal space, he was warmly greeted by three different people and families within the space of ten minutes.

Television affirms your suspicion that life is completely futile, that communication is impossible. Charles Hayward used to think that too; he's since discovered there are multiple forms of communication, and (dismissing the trivialities of mobile phone culture) urges us to discover and use them, urges science to continue research into telekinesis. And far from wallowing in the futility of life, Hayward is one of the most life-affirming people who stalks this dark globe. He's an enabler; an empowering communicator (look at the way he articulates my questions) and a man able to galvanise improvising musicians and differently-abled people together into the same musical platform, where the only reward is the sheer joy of doing it. He has found a successful way to harness improvisational energies, far outside the narrow scope of the London Musicians Collective.

Hayward began his recording career in Quiet Sun, a 1970s band with star players from Roxy Music and Matching Mole. The *Mainstream* LP appeared in 1975, as did *Diamond Head* under Phil Manzanera's name. Hayward had a brief stint with Radar Favourites. The (unrecorded) duo of Dolphin Logic, Hayward and Charles Bullen, mutated into Friendly Rifles with the arrival of Gareth Williams, soon to turn into This Heat. I guess that Hayward has always seen music - and above all, the song - as pretty much a matter of life and death. It's an enabling force, a communicating force, an energising force. This Heat have affected many listeners deeply and somehow passed into a sort of legendary status; I was frankly relieved to find Hayward so approachable on the subject. This Heat released three crucial records (*This Heat* on Piano in 1978, *Health and Efficiency* in 1980, and *Deceit* on Rough Trade in 1981) and continue to win new fans through the extensive These Records reissue programme, which included unreleased tapes surfacing on *Repeat* in 1993, and the John Peel radio sessions *Made Available* in 1996. The desperate need to communicate urgent messages - some of them political, some of them abstract and open-ended, some simply a raw screaming plea for humanity - is inscribed in every

note they played and every sound they ever taped.

Everyone has a This Heat story, whether it's from a live gig or a John Peel broadcast. Without boring you with my This Heat stories, I was a tad surprised to find out that Hank Marvin and The Shadows were one of many influences brought to bear. But I can now listen to 'Twilight Furniture' and hear a minimal, despairing and stripped down version of 'Apache'!

Hardworking and deeply committed to music and song, Hayward forged on through The Camberwell Now, and released two EPs (*Meridians* and *Greenfingers*) and one LP (*The Ghost Trade*) between 1982 and 1987.

Hayward's lyrics showed he was still driven by a need to criticise the powers of control and reinforce a simple plea for humanity. On 1982's 'Cutty Sark', the sea-faring trader becomes a symbol for pure greed, the voice of the Thatcherite philistine: 'It sings to me of another way of life. I ignore it, I choose to ignore it.' What drives Hayward is a clear-minded rage; incensed more than anything by the sheer ignorance of the opposition, the refusal to listen even when healthy, rational alternatives are clearly visible and easy to achieve.

A chance to join Guigou Chenevier, the drummer from Rock In Opposition group Etron Fou Leloublan, seemed like a good opportunity, but playing in Les Batteries proved disappointing: some documents on the AYAA label were released between 1985 and 1987. After a solo LP for the Ink Label (*Survive The Gesture*) in 1987, further solo Hayward works for the Sub Rosa label followed, including *A Tribute to Mark Rothko* (1989), *Skew Whiff* (1990), and *My Secret Alphabet* (1993). 1990's *Switch On War* CD (not heard by this writer) is reckoned to be an angry noise classic, as wild a protest against nuclear war as This Heat's 'Paper Hats'. By 1996, the *Escape From Europe* CD (on Locus Solus) demonstrated his fluency using the new solo-playing method. It involves singing, drumming and a tape machine set-up. It's about daring to be simple and indulge an activity which had worked for him before in his teens; now rediscovering its value in adult life. Finding that it's about old-fashioned values like sweat and hard work, and something that requires regular physical exercise (teetotaler Hayward cycles every day). It's about building up a loyalty with the drum kit he originally bought, rather than wasting money on a new electronic sound-gadget toy. Finding that the mechanics of doing it chimes it with his perception of the Newtonian physics of the universe. Finding that it launches him deeper into the international music circuit, where he is widely recognised as a master drummer and singer, and getting to play with renowned European and Japanese musicians. Further exciting documents of this work (*Double Agents* and *Near and Far*) soon followed, fruitful collaborations with musicians such as Keiji Haino, Tatsuya Yoshida, Otomo Yoshihide, Peter Brötzmann, Jin Harada, Makoto Nomura, his old friend Akira Toyonaga, and Kazuhisha Uchihashi.

Hayward welcomes genuine inclusiveness, but will not tolerate bullshit. He rails passionately against the pernicious forces of laziness, indifference, amnesia and stupidity which are sapping our culture, poisoning our minds. But no passive complainer, he will use his drumkit, his music, his voice, his body and his personality as a weapon against all enemies of society. On stage, when he really enters the demonic-possessed state of energised music production, he can grin like Mephistopheles, shout like an Aboriginal magician, and declaim great things through his drums or his vocal chords. He won't take no for an answer from the audience. If you're there, better pay attention or die. If you got ears, you gotta listen. There isn't enough time for this.

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Charles Hayward interview

DATE 30 March 2001

PLACE his Deptford rehearsal studio

IMAGES by CH and EP

EP What was it like to work with Keiji Haino? It's the only time I've seen you [playing drums] live, at the Fushitsusha gig last year [at the Garage, London].

CH We had two days of rehearsal, and then the day of the gig. I had worked with Haino-san before in two contexts, once live in '96, and then once in Autumn of '99 for an afternoon in a studio where he records. So we recorded the two of us. It was done on this new system. It doesn't sound particularly interesting, the actual sound...and both those times, we *hardly* spoke about what we were doing. First time he played guitar, and Peter Brötzmann played as well, and earlier on that evening he and I both played solo sets, and his had been a percussion thing. The second time, we spoke briefly on the phone in the morning that we met, although it was arranged that we were gonna meet, maybe a month beforehand. And he told me that he would be bringing his Mediterranean instruments, which he did. And in the end he also brought out the traditional electric guitar. But he had a whole variety of stringed instruments from around the Mediterranean. And I said, OK well I'll bring that frame-drum that's like a *bhodran*, as well as the other stuff that I have. So that's what happened, really. Then he asked me to play, because the drummer from Fushitsusha before - he left, he wanted to go to purely improvisational work, I think, or to live in the mountains. And Fushitsusha had a chance to play but they had no drummer. So they asked if I would play, at least for the London gig. So that's how it came about. And that was different from the other times. We were now working on refining a whole working process that was already in place. So I learned a lot is the short answer, I learned an incredible amount about a more gestural way of looking at sound-generation, which almost relates back to dance, in a way.

EP Yes, I've heard how Keiji Haino developed his style, by learning from dance; it was a bigger influence on him than, say, Jimi Hendrix...

CH Right, there's a lot of Butoh and all that sort of expressionist wrenching...

EP He's quite a mysterious fellow, this Haino...maybe it's better to preserve that mystery. But did you get a sense of what motivates his work, through playing with him?

CH I think in the final analysis, what actually motivates his work is the sound he makes, really. And then he provides a context for that, of heavy dimensions. Which in turn helps the sound to become clearer, it doesn't obscure the sound, it enhances it.

EP And the heavy context, to you, is in terms of [Haino's] despair and loneliness?

CH No, I don't mean that. I mean heavy as in unrelentingly stated, heavily emphasised. Not letting up on it, the blackness, the silver...the glint of it. Absolutely. I don't mean just the blackness and the silver in the visuals. I mean the blackness and the silver throughout its reality! Also, the wispy smoke-grey! Like when suddenly the power fails completely, and it goes into this moment of non-sentient stasis. Inert! Becomes suddenly very inert! And then revived, or reinvented. Or maybe not the same thing at all, the other thing's died, but it seems

like it's the same. Very mysterious...not a laptop in sight, as far as I can see!

EP Such a powerful gig. I really enjoyed that one. There was some guy in the toilets saying 'If only this band had some dance beats behind them, they would be a really good band!'

CH Part of me has a desire to set up a contradiction between being alone and being in a room with other people. I like to really stare at that contradiction. And one of the ways for me to do that, in my opinion, is to often use very clear rhythm. Because everyone is agreeing on something, and yet at the same time they're still alone. And I like that duality, and I like the opposition of that. So that's not something that Haino-san likes to use, really. At the very end he said, 'That thing that you were doing that was [African influenced]...' I was

listening to a lot of Gnawah, North African music at the time, and there was this certain sort of way of making the thing spin, that's also to do with the way the drums are tuned, and I just had these two little drums and I'd been using them like that in rehearsal. He wanted me to do this thing. It had more of an atmosphere of celebration around it. My usual context...in response to this guy in the loo saying what that band needs is a few beats, I mean I would come at something with that as definitely part of my [awareness] as one of the areas where things can happen for me. And I had to throw that away to a very large extent to do Fushitsusha, which was a very interesting experience. I've always tried to be thrown into a different context, one way or another. Or, not be in control, in a way. So that was just another way of doing that.

EP The live set up you have now involves you and a drum kit, some tapes...it seems having a rapport with the audience is quite important to you.

CH Yep, yep. So I've got these tapes. The tapes are never in the same place twice! There's two different tape machines, there's no agreed start-point between the two machines. And there's no real start-point in terms of my live performance in relation to any signal on the tape. Although, that's

not completely true! There may be a bass note that...it's there, so that would be a good idea to use that as a start-point, or whatever. And there's also a building up of knowing of these weird, random overlays. Slowly, more and more, even when they're out of synch, you know where each of them is, more and more. And there's my interest in song-writing. So there's song-writing, there's this random system, there's drums. There's weeks between writing the main [body of the song], the feeling of what's a verse and what's a chorus or whatever you want to call it, of a song. And then me walking around, trying to find places of ambiguity, which will allow as many parts of that song to exist on top of them. And then there will be another area of ambiguity, which will allow another part of the song to exist on top of that. And so then I spend a long time working out how I can weave these different things around. I might even find one area of ambiguity which is common throughout all. And that will be some other part. So there's three different sets of signal. I've got loops, but they're not all loops. Some of them are just performances, but performances that have deliberately achieved a state of not being rhythmic socially. So I spend a long time being able to think like this...[claps his hands in an



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irregular pattern]...all the time the pulse is *that*, all that jumping around. It's constantly changing between fast and slow thought, speeding-up and slowing-down thought, jumped-up thought...and it takes me quite a while to actually get to this 'no-mind' place. I used to achieve it in my rehearsal space overlooking the creek, by looking out of the window, looking at the waters and stuff like that. So I get to this no-mind place and that's one reality which I'll do. I also do the loop thing, but I don't use the loop as any way trying to monitor the loop as being in synch with it. That's a conscious thing. So there's these multiple indeterminates, and multiple ambiguities, and there's these songs...and then I slowly develop rhythms that I feel I can use that will add another thread to this whole idea.

As for needing to make a rapport with the audience - my experience at one point in my life, was that communication was a false concept. That we were all living inside a spiritual, and communicational, and cultural chaos. And that there was no real sense in trying to tell anybody else what you thought or what you believed, or anything else. Other than maybe to communicate the inability to communicate! Now, I've been on the planet a bit longer...and I've found that things can challenge that set of beliefs. That in fact, if you go into areas of yourself, and if you open up the areas of possibility at some of the edges of contemporary physics, then you'll get to the idea of things like the mind is a unified field. And that people like Brötzmann...well, for some reason Brötzmann is a big symbol for me, a big reference point. These people...[musicians] who are committing magic, on a regular basis, across the face of Western Europe and America! You know - contemporary, telepathic magic between people! No wonder they don't appear on MTV! This is stuff outside of 'product'. This is communication beyond the mobile phone. This is almost anti-mobile phone music! It presumes the non-existence, in a way, of the mobile phone. It is the antithesis of the mobile phone.

EP Because the worst thing about mobile phones is...people don't communicate with them. They have nothing to say.

CH Absolutely! Absolutely! It's a parody of telepathy! And yet nothing is done with them! And, living with a woman for 28 years, and not getting jaded and bored by it, but letting the intuitive and telepathic also take place. Realising that it *can* take place. Being with people with learning disability. People with autism. And finding that your own rate of synchronicity and coincidence and telepathy...has ascended hugely! Bathing in their presence, doing things with them, maybe of a rhythmic nature. Pulse helps all this stuff. [Realising] that maybe communication *is* happening! I went to see a disability art show the other day, and this woman was talking about 'your stupid language'. And there was a convention at the House of Lords of multiple faiths, and people were using music, and dance, and gesture as part of the debate, part of the discourse. Working with people with learning disability, and having annual general meetings. The language of reporting back to people has to change. Communication is possible, maybe we've just been looking in the wrong way! So I have therefore looked at people like Christy Moore and Vin Garbutt and people like that, and I've asked 'OK, how have they been handling this thing? How are they handling the situation?' I'm looking at the Folk tradition, which is a tradition much more connected to pre-Einstein thought, this thing's got broken. And there will be friendships made, one way or another, some sort of artifice is used to work the audience towards being sympathetic to the situation.

Now, in Russia they've been working with people of good will on sub-atomic particles. And these 13 or 14 people of good will can exercise [telekinesis], can access this place of mind as a unified field, and they can actually work on these sub-atomic particles. However, the minute an observer comes in, the cynic at the back of the room, then the communication, and the ability to do this work, diminishes considerably. So for me, [when I'm performing] it's like you're either in or you're out, and I'm not going to address this problem with bullshit like whether it's 'cool' or not. I'm just going to talk about the world - if I talk about the world, I'm gonna access the world, if I'm gonna abstract from anything, and I'm gonna try and involve you in it! Because I don't wanna impress a bunch of cognoscenti. I want to communicate, with some people. I don't want to communicate with people who already know what I do, or who like what I already like. In fact, the people I really want to communicate with are people who've never heard what I've done before, and who don't like what I like. Those are the ones I really want to talk to. So when I was at the Queen Elizabeth Hall, doing that gig for the LMC, a commissionaire came up to me afterwards, a young guy in a uniform, manifesting repression! Telling me how much he loved it! And how it was really, really beautiful. For me, that was a fantastic experience - much more

than a load of other people telling me they like it. There's this guy who was 'outside', just there on his job, living a job that was very hierarchical...for me that was important. Those sort of moments are the important ones. That, or the small 12 year-old boy at the front of the audience, which happened to me before, the parents had come along because the son in law was playing at the gig or something. The guys from the African High-Life band who tell me that the movement of the stuff is very like their own and in the animist tradition very much like back in their villages. Not the stuff that we let the tourists see, the real stuff! So those are the sort of people that I really respond to. They're the ones I'm trying to communicate with, not the ones who came to hear the 'avant-garde experience'. Do you see what I'm trying to say? I try and cut away the bullshit. So that involves talking about all sorts of stuff, some of it forbidden. And I love talking about the forbidden. Now it would be easier for me in some contexts to talk about...you know, 'which taboo do you wanna talk about?' I can't think of a taboo that's cool, but there are these 'cool' taboos, and 'uncool' taboos...

I've been living around here for quite a long time, I work on youth projects, special needs projects...I've got to *know* people. My early life was one of totally being in the wrong place at the wrong time. And when I first came here, I was definitely in the wrong place. I wasn't supposed to be here. And yet I knew that all my life I wanted to be much more somewhere where there was a sense of fellowship between people. I never wanted to be somewhere where there were loads of privet hedges and stuff! And so I came here, and yet couldn't really make connections, couldn't really be part of something. And yet now, I'm 'the guy that does that weird music', but 'he's a really nice bloke and he really means it, and he taught my son how to do such-and-such'. Suddenly, it's not the absurdist experience - which I do still see, and which still resonates throughout me, in the world of work, for instance - is not the only truth. That's why I resent things like *Eastenders*, where it's an absurdist existence, even within a domestic [setting], all the time. One of violence and deceit.

EP This is extraordinarily inspiring. I mean, most people go the opposite way. They may start out quite optimistic about life, and then develop a more cynical pessimistic perspective, but you're saying that something's turned you around. Communication was not possible, now you see that many forms of communication are possible.

CH Yes, I see multiple forms. Also from multiple parts of the body. Not just from the brain, not just through the mouth. Multiple communication from internal organ-level, right the way up to telepathic level! That's definitely what I see. I see this as being consistently defied by projects like the Genome Project. The idea to map the DNA, the human coil of information. First of all, they declare 90 percent of it's junk! Then they start wanting to eradicate the learning disabled, who are - it's coming more and more clear to me, [they] may be relay stations for this whole idea of the mind as unified field. So in fact, it's almost like an X-Men situation. They're out to eradicate the 'mutants' because they're going to help us! If you think about what would happen in a nuclear [war] situation, what we need is alternative genetic information. What is not absolutely survival-based at the moment, yet which keeps turning up, might be there as just a safety back-up, to all sorts of toxic information, or radio information, that will wipe out most of humanity, and will manage to maintain a certain amount of the Down's syndrome community, or whatever. And then five generations down the road when things have cleared down a bit, maybe we can mutate back to this form! We need these alternative forms! It's just absolutely ridiculous to have a closed-off view of humanity...this idea again of 'stupid language'...closed-off forms of communication. When you use those forms, then you come up against the idea of the absurdity of communication. When you access alternative forms, suddenly there is the possibility.

EP A lot of people have observed this, but the water imagery you keep coming back to...does it have a personal significance to you? Drowning imagery, ocean imagery, sea-faring imagery...even the washing machine! Or is it a personal spell that you don't want to reveal?

CH It's not like that at all, really. It hasn't come through so much recently. Maybe it's not there any more. I don't know. I was very interested in Joseph Conrad, very interested in the idea of the European experience of 'order', versus the possibility of the ocean as a model of 'chaos'. The need for political hierarchy on the boat, to make order possible in a world of chaos. So it's quite a centralist understanding of the thing.

EP You might tend to see mankind as a Ship of Fools, almost?

CH I still see mankind [like that]...I think we're spinning through space on this empty voyage! But are we really sitting beside a table, are we really actually so small, that we can't even conceive of how small we are? Or are we as big as we think we are? And yet, we may as well take this thing that we're going through to the nth degree, because we only get this [life] for a limited period of time, and then...if mind is a unified field, and mind is matter, then why doesn't a stone think? Or maybe a stone does think, but it only thinks stone-ness! There'll be times in returning to just thinking about being at the top of a tree. There's plenty of time for that, there's *endless* time for that. There's only a bit of time for *this*. There's even only a bit of time for time! We may as well celebrate it and be into it.

So this idea of Joseph Conrad is one way of seeing it, and then the idea that perhaps 90 percent of our body is made up of water. We're inside water when we're inside our mother. I don't know, I just found it a useful way of looking at different things, but using a consistent language. If it becomes self-conscious, then it's thrown away. People have been remarking on it, so I've been trying...it's not been happening. I don't even mean journalists, but guys who come up to you while you're at a bar at a gig in Italy, and ask you to sign a couple of records, and then say 'oh, this water thing...' I don't want it to become something that's predictable, you know...here's the water song! So for the last bit of time, it's tended to fall away really. I mean, the washing machine one is unfortunate, cause I didn't really think of it as part of that at all.

EP *There seemed to be a lot of isolation songs in This Heat, where by the time of The Camberwell Now the theme seemed to be more of a 'community' thing.*

CH I suppose this is all part and parcel of the same theme, really. It seemed to me that This Heat used the word 'YOU' a lot, and it was quite finger-pointing. And then Camberwell Now would use 'WE' a lot more. And to a certain extent, the only thing I can really use since I've not been in a group, or any sort of long-term group, is 'I'. So sometimes I still use 'WE' meaning us as an evolving system, which is really what I'm obsessed with. Each decision we make is an important thing and we should think about it, and we should try and do it not just for the easy solution to a minor problem staring us in the face, but with thought for 200 years' time. It's all about tomorrow. It's not about yesterday. It's not about revenge. It's not about history, except to learn from it, so that we can make better decisions about tomorrow. So if we learn that holding history against people doesn't actually solve any questions, and that some sort of sense of redemption is what we need to offer to cultures.

EP *What about the idea of living a utopian ideal through your music? Is that part of...I felt with This Heat certainly that the message was partly about...within the lyrics was some sort of utopian ideal we could all aspire to, and it was also lived out in the way the group was playing together. There were no stars, no showing off...*

CH The idea of doing something because it's 'cool', or because everyone else is doing it, which is really what 'cool' is a lot of the time - forget it! A lot of what you're talking about now is done because...you know, This Heat did achieve that sort of place you're talking about, it's true, we did, I won't deny it. I think we were aware of it, and at times it was hell, and at times it was absolutely the most ecstatic experience that you could possibly hope for. So - absolutely true, but it's like saying 'he does a lot of work for charity'. It goes without saying, so let's not talk about it. I think that the only good music comes about by living your life inside the music, and the music

inside your life. The whole thing being one big thing. If you don't do that, it's bollocks. It's just S-Club 7, or whatever. So really can't stand that whole thing, love it when people are living their lives inside the music and the music inside their lives, and I hope I can detect the bullshit, and hope that I'm doing something like that myself. But it's almost like archeological radio-messages or something, it informs the work, it's part of the whole thing.

EP *How about the idea that music can be critical of society...trying to do something about it, how can you convey this through sound, the idea that maybe an uncomfortable sound will make the listener uncomfortable, and signal the idea that all is not well with the world. Oh sorry, this sounds like a glib observation...*

CH No, it's not a glib observation. It's almost like why we still have lyrics, to me. Now is not the time for just 'pure' sound. Now is not the time - yet - because now that we're in a world where we...well, I'm a real naive, but I really don't understand how, somehow or

other, all signs are equal, and people can appropriate them with equal ease, and that they're of equal value. I've heard Miles [Davis] just dragged through the dirt in the last couple of years since he's been dead. His sound being used in other situations. Undermining it. The man works with his lips and with his teeth, then he's gotten into an argument with his woman, feels a bit weird, his sound is going and he's got to build it up again, and yet he can't be bothered, because he's getting into a bit of this and that, reading a lot of books at the time, his sound's gone again, so now he's got to hide it with a wah-wah. I mean that's a LIFE, we're talking about! It's a fucking LIFE! It's not some sign of equal value to - Jesus, it makes me so fucking ANGRY! It makes me so angry, it's unbelievable!

EP *Because it's so easy to sample records...*

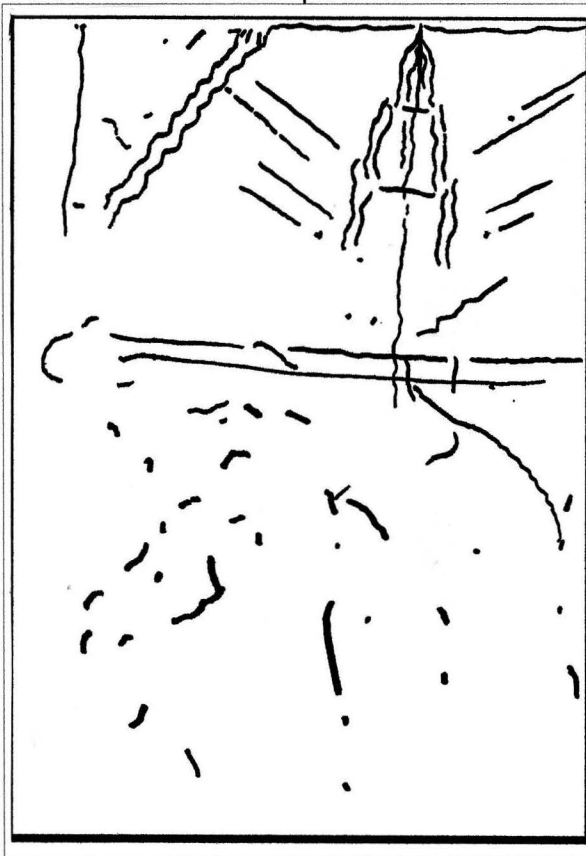
CH (*shouting*) Because it just appropriates some guy's fucking STORY!! It's just SCANDALOUS, actually!! It's absolutely OUTRAGEOUS!! [They think] 'I bet we can get the bastard back...he told the truth...let's make his truth in this sea of bullshit, with his sound all over it! And then let the people try and find out which is the truth and which is the bullshit! Let's completely flood it with him!'

Meaningless - just re-jigged up to

fucking sequencers - stick it on this, stick it on that. Oh, it makes me want to just fucking DIE!! That whole thing of taking peoples' sounds, and seeing it as an equal sign to all other signs, like it's some fucking Walt Disney logo! Makes me fucking sick! I think the culture's going up the spout, when it thinks that that's a way of doing things! You know...(*sarcastically*) 'he's a really heavy musician, he does some really heavy shopping down in those second-hand record shops down in Kingston, he goes there looking in those boxes, and he comes back sometimes with this real easy-listening shit, and he listens to it and he finds the horn riff that's really good! Oh! What an intrepid explorer!' Culture as a mirror of shopping! Right the way down the line! The consumer experience at the centre of the creative practice! It makes me SICK!...Sorry to shout.

EP *Is your music a way of motivating the listener towards freedom of thought, an exhortation towards questioning what they find in society, rather than simply accepting everything...*

CH Absolutely! Absolutely! That's all there is, really. For me, at the moment, as a political act, the only thing to say is to find your own reality. There's too many people telling you to follow their reality, and I'm not going to tell you to follow my reality. What I'm going to say is what I can see, and encourage you to manifest yours too. So I'm going to manifest mine to the nth degree! For me, it's got a lot of



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sweat, a lot of sheer physical exertion, it's got a lot of crappy things like lifting 16 bags, instead of carrying the laptop! Actually celebrating the stage weights, the sheer...my dad in his overalls doing his DIY-ness of it all. [Laptop users say] 'Oh, but it's so convenient!' Well, I say fuck the convenience! I want elephants! I want loads of elephants, and I want the Alps! I want something absurd, even! In a way, to defy the norm of the ease of things, to take on the physicality which has been lost amongst people of my generation, and people younger than me.

EP I can see how you make that commitment to playing the drums the way that you do...the commitment to the 'old-fashioned' craft of actually playing an instrument, rather than the [easier option] of using an electronic instrument that 'does everything' for you.

CH I do use electronics, but as an addendum. Someone said to me 'I get it! You're a Reverse-DJ!' And actually, at one point, that was one of the thought processes that went through this thing with the drums and the tapes. It is sort of a DJ in negative. Instead of the beats being on the disc and the detail being in the spins that are spun in, as it were, the beats and the grooves are the things that are being made physically present. [With me] it's the opposite way round, quite consciously. I went to see Ella Fitzgerald at the Royal Festival Hall, and the drummer was playing, and he demonstrated skill. He didn't demonstrate it like it was an exposition of skill, but he *manifested* skill. Skill was a part of the essence of what he did. Part of what he did was the fact that he's been doing it for years. Now I know some musicians who still haven't fixed the guitar lead that was wrong 12 years ago, still don't know to plug that into such-and-such, they haven't...you know, Gareth [Williams] started out in This Heat with no technique. But by the end of his time in This Heat, he had a lot more technique than what he started with. We rode the fact that he had no technique. But we didn't fetishise it, that's the whole point. That would be like saying I want to have the front of my brain removed! Part of technique is just the thing of doing it over and over again. You learn how it makes sense to do it. And your body tells you how to make sense of it, and your body grows into doing it and makes more sense of it. So, *not* acquiring a certain amount of skill and technique is a denial of what's actually going on. One way people get round this, and I've seen this happen, is to change instruments all the time. Why?! What are you scared of? I've got the same drum kit that I had in 1972. Why change it all? I've got a very nice instrument. When I got it, I knew I wasn't going to be profligate and get another nice one and smash this one up, not treat it good. I don't need to get something new just because somebody's designed it! And my skill is getting to be more and more comfortable and more at ease, and knowing more about being with this instrument. And by doing that, the skill becomes more transparent. And in fact technique is less what is addressed. People constantly complain of playing new instruments, all right we'll try and 'avoid skill', they're addressing technique much more than people who just get on with it. You know, Keith Rowe talking about the absurdity of lots of different instruments. [Buying] new instruments, and people starving in India. I can see the contradiction. Constantly forking out for some new classic guitar, a fantastic instrument...well, I knew I was getting a fantastic instrument and that I was going to take it very seriously and use it for the rest of my life. I've had this drum kit since I was 12, and it's part of this whole thing of respecting the world for me.

EP A big thing with punk rock, a sign of credibility was not being able to play 'properly', wasn't it? I remember This Heat saying that the whole three-chord thing was in fact quite a reactionary attitude...

CH Yes, I think the main thing we thought about punk was that it was a good laugh! But there was a point where dimensions of the imagination were not being addressed. You know [imitates repetitive guitar riff], after a while it's going to suggest the same landscape over and over again. It's not going to lead to anywhere else. It was about that, for us. Also, we started just before punk really happened. So we were in a very advantageous position, we were thrown into this completely up-in-the-air situation, along with everybody else. It was like Year Zero again. And yet we'd already stated our case, on a very minor degree. It wasn't like we could suddenly hide away and come back with little white shirts and ties, and pretend we were other people. We were *into* what we were doing, for God's sake! We loved the punk thing like crazy, because it was like these young people really getting on with it.

EP Would you describe your working method as 'efficient'? The idea of recycling tapes, the idea of conveying the maximum amount of energy with the minimum possible wastage. I suppose what I'm talking about is an organisational thing. Erm - I read this about modern music

generally, that avant-garde music that appears to be so 'silly' is actually one of the most efficient ways of realising a score, or getting a composition together. At least, it can be. As opposed to writing for an orchestra, which is very inefficient, and very expensive. You can compose a tune on the piano, but then you have to compose all these multiple parts, for the strings, for the horns, and a conductor has to marshal all these different bits of paper. It's actually a very wasteful way of generating music.

CH I think that music is a sufficiently safe arena that we should be allowed to explore everything, from extreme fascism to anarchistic utopianism, as models for free thought of all sorts, and [for] an investigation and rejection of the use of some forms in much less safe arenas, like real life, for instance! I think that's one of the functions of music. So - Von Karajan - all power to his elbow! Leonard Bernstein, all these fascists! Plus the charismatic utopian semi-fascists, like Cornelius Cardew and people like that! They're still laying down a style, they're being 'Christians'. All these forms, let them all flourish and give them as much money as they need to have! [And also let's] celebrate the ones who make a point of not needing very much money at all. Don't hide them away, just because they don't have any money. They're talking about a system and trying to make it work as well. The ones that do it with an old paper bag and a teapot, they're talking about it as well. Just because they're not using computer-generated imagery doesn't mean that they're not part of the survival mechanism. In fact, they're probably more part of it! Because when everyone's looking over *there*, the problem's really happening over *there*. That's my experience. I really think there comes a point where collectivism - or anything - becomes the rule, and then the only one with free thought is the one who's not thinking that! That's why I'm frightened by - challenged by - 'political correctness'. It's a way of appropriating good ideas, like multi-culturalism, towards the ends and objectives of control.

EP That's right, it appears to be broad-minded and pro-freedom, but it isn't really.

CH No, it's making a new establishment. If you make enough of a re-branding, if you do enough of a spin on the fact that there's black people in this bit of it, or Paul Boateng is part of this...for God's sake, Paul Boateng! Honestly! What a joke! It's tokenism, it's all that shit. It's the formation of an elite.

EP And it ends up being less inclusive.

CH It becomes less inclusive of forms of thought. It becomes more inclusive of appearance, whether [people] are black or Indian. For me, going back to central roots like rhythm, song-form, accessing ideas from Folk music, in a way that's also a way of questioning the given. Right now everything seems to be floating in this idea of artifice, and this idea of construct, and this idea of perfection. I can see that happening in the so-called 'avant-garde', just as much as I can see it in failed Top-20 pop mainstream [music], which is dying on its feet and everyone knows it; as much as I can see it in politics, and anywhere really. I can see it all over the place. I think the thing to do is try and achieve independent thought. Quite a cliché, really, but it seems to be...that's the way to break through, to some place that's real.

EP But people are scared of reality. I've stopped listening to pop and rock music in the 1990s, because it appeared to have no reality to it at all! Just layers of irony, and little else. It seemed to have become a joke, perpetrated between the music press and these non-caring musicians, a joke on the audience. There were lots of quotes, and lots of irony.

CH I understood irony to be about the humour that arose between one point in time and another point in time. I think that involves ideas of history and of development of things. This [current] fetishising is [focussing on] the kitschness of things, not really irony anymore, it's kitschness. It's cultural quotes, it's very bad jazz improvisation where some guy goes 'bah dah dah dah di-di-di-di'...it's using quotations. There was a *Top of the Pops* show, I think it was Grandmaster Flash or something like that. It was back in the days when I still had a television - 1986 or sometime like that. Eric B and Rakim or whatever. There was a BBC in-house video constructed to go with this. Or maybe it was made by them? It doesn't really matter! Because what was used was anthropological film of Africa from the 1920s, little bits of the cartoon-parody version of Africans that would appear in Popeye or Betty Boop, or The Goon in Popeye, bits of a white man being fried in a big pot by some cannibals, the big-lipped thing, little bits of Harlem...sometimes I think the culture is so bombarded with bullshit, and the function of dream at the end of the day is this rapid-

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eye movement thing, to discard unwanted information. To review it, and discard what's not wanted. I think that's what we're doing culturally, a lot of the time. I think we're just looking at endless amounts of bits that we've got from our past, and we're in a dream-state where everything's meaningless, but it's being constantly reviewed or re-run and rejected, slowly. Bits of it are dropping off. That's the function of a huge amount of our culture at the moment. It's like the regurgitative thing of being asleep...it's like *The Matrix*...

EP *It's not a very healthy situation...*

CH It's an extremely *unhealthy* situation. The type of people we are is going to be controlled, soon. Who we are - before we're born - is controlled. I always feel deep sympathy for the children of royalty. And deep sympathy for the royalty. Because they are not free. At birth, before their birth, even when they were sperm and eggs, before they were united into something completely human, their choices were completely cut down. More than any other person on the planet, almost. More than a poor starving kid in India, even. That doesn't mean they're going to starve, of course, but their choices are precluded and pre-determined. They are not born free. We watch them, we curse them and vilify them, we breed them and grow them, we farm them, and we curse them some more! It's absolutely inhuman! It's worse than having a pedigree dog.

EP *You make them sound like factory-farmed animals!*

CH Well, they are! Their lines are absolutely pre-determined. They are not free, they are not even free genetically. They are truly un-free, the most un-free people on the planet.

EP *Is it your fear, then, that this control is going to creep into social conditioning?*

CH My belief is that it will become like [a division between] types of person, and other people who are free. This elite who are free to have personality. Free to be irascible, free to be lovable, free to be...that guy who drives me mad! All that stuff is going to belong to an elite, and their offspring. Wild, organic grown.

EP *Tell me what music you like. Has anything been an influence on you?*

CH Well, I could give you a great big long list. I used to like The Who! But I hated them after *Tommy*. Although I loved *Who's Next*, as well - such a great record. The Who demonstrated some sort of sense of violence, and once I realised you could unleash that inside of music, that it wasn't somewhere else but involved inside of music too - I was completely - that was it, I was away! Before that I liked The Shadows, because of their sense of mystery. I knew how the sound was being made, I think I found it mysterious that the sound was being made by that, but also - the sound wasn't what I was listening to after a bit, what I was listening to was clouds rolling over a prairie, or stardust above a cityscape! You can't beat Norrie Paramour, and you can't beat Hank Marvin, or Brian Bennett, or Tony Mehan before that. The drummers were great, and the whole thing was good. It was innocent, it was naive, on the surface, but I was thinking the other day how much I loved it, and how much of a model it was. That was where the 'strange' was for me, before The Who. But also it was in people like Ella Fitzgerald. My dad was telling me about this mysterious woman. The record label was dark blue with stars, a shooting star on it...it was a Brunswick 78. It all went together, the night sky on the label...she was important. And that whole thing, this weird other sort of secret, black, African thing, that isn't African, it's men in suits, it's over in America but it's people from Africa and doing this music that sometimes calls itself jungle music.

The Cotton Club stuff and all that. There was a mystery going on...(*imitates a Cab Calloway rhythm*). That was big, then The Who opened me up very early to Debussy, and to Albert Ayler, and to Archie Shepp, and to John Coltrane, and then I was off! So by the time I was 14 I was listening to all those guys. Very luckily, Southwark Public Library was just down the road from me, and it was just amazing - there was *Fontana Mix* by John Cage, *Chappaqua Suite*, I was getting these all out in '68 and '69. I knew that Morton Subotnick was bullshit, back then! Because I was in amongst all this other stuff at the time. I knew that Morton Subotnick was 'trying to tell me a story' in sound, it was programmed music, like some of the bad English [composers], Percy Grainger. Malcolm Arnold those people. Very limp-wristed, weak, effete, English stuff, which had to fall back on the literary. And I found that with Morton Subotnick as well.

EP *And Albert Ayler's great drummer, Sunny Murray, on Spiritual Unity.*

CH I knew Sunny Murray from photos on a record by Clifford Thornton - *Freedom Suite*, I think it's called, or *Pan-African Suite*. It was one of the BYG-Actual records. The picture on the cover had

Sunny Murray just playing a snare drum, a cymbal, a bass drum and maybe a high-hat. But no tom-toms. And the most *ferocious* look I'd ever seen a drummer achieve at that time, even more ferocious than Keith Moon. More militant. Definitely had a reason to be nasty, as opposed to just 'too much speed'. I wouldn't like to meet him when he's not agreeing with you!

EP *The Quiet Sun thing, was it just a little episode?*

CH It wasn't really a little episode, it was my first band when I was a kid, with Phil Manzanera. I was about 15. He was only 17, there was Bill McCormick, who was the bass player in Matching Mole. The three of us were at school together, I was a year below Bill and Phil. There was a variety of other people. Bill was more like a singer and a tambourine player. Phil was a guitarist. We'd get a bass player in and another guitarist. That went on. We'd go through from the blues to very moronic, one-dimensional A-A-A-A form - no B at all! Just completely flat form of music. Songs that we wrote ourselves. Then they became more complex, then they became - like the Curly-Wurly bar - 'far too elaborate'! I suppose when the group reformed, some three or four years after it had ended because Bill joined Matching Mole and then Phil joined Roxy Music three months

later. They both went off and did their things. Then Phil got the chance to make a solo record, and he made two solo records on the budget of one. This was *Mainstream* and *Diamond Head*. So it wasn't an old experience, it was one that had come to a natural end, but it was bugging all of us, because it got a point where it was getting to be quite good, in its own way - and yet it never got recorded. The three of us, plus Dave Jarreau who joined later - turned out he went to the same school as us - we were bugged by the fact that in '72 we stopped, and when we got a chance to make it in '75, we made it. We looked at the stuff and tried to rework it. If we did anything at all, we pulled back some of the Curly-Wurlyness! The music used yer 'complex time signatures'...but it did actually go for the jugular. It did use a lot of all that [progressive] stuff, but it did not think that was the only thing that was happening. What was happening was a certain sort of progression. I've been listening to it recently, for the first time in 15 years, and it's of that time - and it uses things that were central to peoples' obsessions musically at that time. But it also is trying to 'get' you, just as much as other things try to 'get' you. Other things I've been involved in probably try to get you with more malevolence, more clear intent.



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EP Then there's Dolphin Logic!

CH Dolphin Logic was after Quiet Sun, as a thing at school and just after that. But during and before Quiet Sun. Dolphin Logic was me and Charles Bullen, just the two of us, and was much more opaque, less clear-formed, much less muscular - more fluid, in a way. More like a memory of some time gone past. I was playing drums, and starting to really get into using sad sounds, like the melodica. A sound in the back. That guy playing at Japanorama, playing the sho. I see them as another parallel to it all. I love the melodica, think it's a great instrument. Bought my first one when I was 12 years old. I made attempts back then to use the pipe system, and play it with it on my bass drum, and try and use it. A lot of things I'm doing now, it's like I've given myself permission finally to do! It's very weird. Things that weren't really allowed. It was the only way I could do it back then.

EP This Heat comes out of that, and Gareth Williams turns up?

CH Yeah, Charles Bullen and I were also into this electric [sound] - I mean Dolphin Logic was electric guitar, and it got sort of strange and shrill and abstract and all that other stuff at times, as well. So it wasn't like acoustic improvisation jazz, although some of that stuff was part of it too. The jazz thing wasn't really there, more like improvisation. We wanted to make this other thing, and we tried various different things, which were other peoples' projects. I'd join and then he'd join, it would never quite work. Almost, but not quite...one of these projects had a manager. We got a manager, of all things. It was this bloke who was an absurdist. It was Gareth! He ran a record shop in Leicester Square. And he was just insane! He'd do the most incredible things in his shop. He had these amazing posters all over the wall. He was just very very funny and he wouldn't give a shit. A&M had an offer where, if you shipped enough copies of *The Six Wives of Henry VIII* by Rick Wakeman, you'd get a colour TV! So Gareth ordered hundreds and hundreds of copies, and subsequently got himself a TV. And then he would have sessions downstairs in the cellar where he and other work-people and friends of his would come along, and he'd roll up a few as it were, and they would proceed to deface and smash and generally destroy these afore-mentioned records. Of which there were thousands! Then he'd phone up A&M, and say 'Sorry! That batch you sent me, they're all scratched!' and then 'Actually, I don't really want them. Can you send me *Kohntarkozs* by Magma?' So all the copies of that Magma record must have come from his shop. So that's a story...lots of weird shit, couldn't give a monkeys. And [Gareth had] no musical manifestation particularly at all, other than - going back to this idea of an intrepid explorer going through the record boxes - having a fantastic, to-die-for, taste in music, and a record collection to back it up. Absolutely *gorgeous* fucking taste! Aww, we used to have these amazing nights when we'd just try and out-face each other! CB, me and him...we all be in these parties up in his rooms, going 'Yeah, but have you heard this?' Constantly undermining [each other]...then suddenly trying to wrong-foot each other by playing some sort of total bollocks, like Max Bygraves or something! Trying to weird each other out, take each down to a darker and darker place. Bring each other into some place where song suddenly made sense again. All this stuff. Banging it out. This would be going on for like 5 or 6 hours. Insane records played at each other. So - Quiet Sun had a top 30 hit - *Mainstream* got into the Top 30, only for a couple of weeks, but it did. Phil Manzanera was in the group. This guy came up to us and said 'Look, if you reform Quiet Sun for a couple of gigs with Phil Manzanera as special guest, get yourself another guitarist, I'll put on a couple of gigs at The London Victoria. I'd really like to do that, and I'm sure I could sell the tickets.'

EP When was this?

CH It was in 1976, or very late 1975. So we set about making this happen, Phil and me, because we were the only ones able to do that. So we auditioned these other guitarists, and the one that I'm pushing for is Charles Bullen. Charles Bullen gets the gig, because he's the bloke able to handle it all, and he's got new ideas that sound good. We do a bit of work, work on a demo on Bill's four-track, and [it became clear] 'we need some energy transferral here, for it to go across from the stage and into the audience. What about some bloke who plays some percussion and sings? I know this guy who's just a maniac! So does CB! We both know him!' [It was agreed] let's get Gareth down. Within about four or five minutes Gareth and Bill - it's perfectly clear they absolutely do not like each other at all! After a bit, Bill says 'we'll mix this in a few weeks' time, but I need to take this home now.' He's walking down the road... 'I'll do you a rough mix!' Uh-oh, he's leaving. And that's the last I've ever seen of him! Spoke to him on the phone a couple of times. But the last I saw him

he was walking down the path with the four-track [demo] under his arm. Leaving me, Charles and Gareth going 'YESS! It's the three of us! Let's go upstairs and play!' It was just obvious. We'd gone from being music-with-permission, to suddenly music with no permission at all. Even down to [working with] a guy who can't play. But we know he's the biggest wack-head we've ever met. So that's how it happened. Very nice. And a real break from one whole thing, and a whole take on 'success'...looking at it from that angle, turning your back on a whole thing to make something else.

EP This Heat got into using tapes on stage a lot more...at one stage, you were thinking of having a fourth member, devoted to operating tapes?

CH Well, at one point we wanted to make the process clearer. In a sort of Brechtian sense, or something. We were using tapes from the desk, and it was like a relegated position. Like one of the roadies would do it, it ended up being Charles' brother [Peter Bullen] would do it. But another guy would be working the sound, and then I suppose we should have let the sound guy be on stage as well. So in the end, the percentages - at least for the first release on Rough Trade - it wasn't divided between three, it was divided between five. After a while that became purely theoretical. When the group split and we reissued the records, it went back to three, because that was the truth of how the records came into being. But for us to be live, and for us to manifest as a group, there were five of us that had to be around, so we divided the money up between five of us. All the tapes were made by us, although there were these intuitive moments that transferred from us to the back of hall, when the guy would know when to release it off pause to play. Sometimes, it would be transcendental! Tapes were very important. Then with The Camberwell Now, it became that idea of having tapes on stage. A tape switchboard.

EP You went straight into The Camberwell Now, after This Heat?

CH Well, it didn't feel like that at the time. It felt like I had wasted opportunities, and energies...Trefor Goronwy played bass. When Gareth left This Heat, *Deceit* had only just come out, CB and I were wildly committed to it. We were even prepared to contradict what we'd said, what we'd held very dear, the idea that This Heat was just this group of three people, and it wasn't anything other than those three people. And we got two other guys in the band, to be able to...I mean, even the language I use there, two other guys! That says it all really - it was a failed experiment. It was horrible! It was like this weird afterthought thing, but we did it. We did a five week tour and then we had two more gigs about a month apart from that, and we just fulfilled that thing and did it. One of those guys was Trefor Goronwy. I knew Trefor was an interesting player, and I knew he had will and intention and ideas, and I thought it wasn't a fair experience to put anybody through, not ourselves, not him, not anybody. So I got another series of songs together, which in fact I'd written before the Falklands War, which was the whole *Meridian* thing. And Charles said 'oh it's history man, who's interested in that?' In a weird sort of way, it was oddly prescient. I was really pissed off that we didn't do it before the war happened! So it was now after the fact, but it still needed to happen in a way. Looking back at the war, or looking back at ourselves. So I set about recording these songs, and that's how The Camberwell Now came about. So that's why Bullen's on one track, 'cause at one point this was going to be part of a This Heat thing. He let me have the track, and Camberwell Now evolved as the record finished. So then we were a group with a bass player and a drummer, and a recording engineer. A ridiculous sort of group, a non-group. And I said to Steve [Rickard], I've always had this idea about 'letting different tapes through'...a bit like a mellotron, but it's not a mellotron. The thing's constantly in play, but because you're not letting it through into the amplifier you can't hear it. And only when you switch it through, can you hear it. So you can play it like a keyboard, or a mellotron. The mellotron works on exactly on that basis, but it works on ten seconds of tape, and this would be up to three quarters of an hour of tape. So that's what happened...summer days on Hyde Park would become a signal, as would slowed-down loops of all of us singing 24 times over. That [method] became a huge part of Camberwell Now, a whole part of the process. It was another use of tape again, perhaps the most detailed use of tape that I'd been involved in. Steve was an ex BBC radio engineer, so he had a lot of technique about recording, how to make it more realistic or cleaner. A whole set of production values. [With This Heat], the tapes were done on a very multiple technological level, it could be like a shit microphone and a bad cassette machine or it could be a 24-track Ampeg. With Steve, it had to be either a Uri, a professional

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recording, or a multi-track studio down to Revox or whatever. That was his way of doing things. I think peoples' personalities are more important than ethical things about technologies. 'No, it's got to be a shittier piece of equipment than that!' I mean, how un-rock and roll can you get?

EP When did you start improvising on the international circuit?

CH I got approached by Guigou Chenevier, to join this drum trio [Les Batteries], and I just didn't know what the hell to do. I just ignored it. Then he approached me again. I thought, what am I? Why not try it? [I was a bit suspicious at first] because it was a 'project', because I would have to make quick decisions with people with a view to there being a tour after a two-week rehearsal period. I would be committing myself to performance before knowing what the hell it would sound like. I've become more used to doing that, but I used to find that extremely hard and highly questionable. I had a very strong sense of my own personal line, and it closed down an impossible amount of other things. You weren't sure that you were going to maintain your own degree of control. You didn't open yourself up to this series of possibilities. So it seemed to be, at one point, anti-creative, highly theoretical. To be living completely enclosed by 'idea'. So I thought fuck it, I'd better go and do it, do the opposite of what I think. That led to onto people knowing that I was more open to ideas. Heiner Goebbels put on one of the drum trio gigs, basically so he could meet me and ask me to be involved in a project of his. People were realising that I wasn't doing [just] one thing, they would see that I could do other things. But I've found that even working with special needs [people]...I didn't necessarily find all that international-project thing very satisfying. I must say that. There are things I've done, with people who I respect, who I want to see flourish and continue as they struggle through their lives, and all power to them - but I'm not the right person for that. They asked me to bring some aspect of a style, that for me immediately becomes a literary reference, whereas for them it's the real thing. And I'm suddenly inside the world of pastiche. I'll do the four gigs that I've said I'll do, but I won't do any more.

EP Do the same reservations apply to your Near and Far gigs, the CDs released on Locus Solus...?

CH Oh, I got treated so special on those two tours to Japan, that I was encouraged to realise the inside of my head outside, as much as possible, and they would write back to me and they would encourage me further. They'd say yes, but don't you think that...so the first two, I played five gigs, five different sets, thematically linked - either lyrically, or in terms of...one of them was very performance-based, and each of the nights was given a separate title. And I knew who was coming, I was asked if I'd like to play with such-and-such. I'd give the titles in reference to the theme of the evening, which I would also try and make the title refer to the people I was working with on those nights, and it was all balanced around what I knew was happening. So I had two months back in London of thought-preparation, building set-lists, constructing flows of music. Five separate flows of music, some of which overlapped with some of the material. Five completely different versions of the narrative. And that included shaping the evenings. One night I did a song at the beginning, then all the other people played, then I came back on and did my set, then we played in combinations again...so I was allowed to use some of the stuff I'd learned from Accidents & Emergencies. And I was taken as being the visiting guest to the situation, so it wasn't me fulfilling a brief in Japan, like it was with Heiner Goebbels. Or Keep The Dog, that's another one I love doing. Fred Frith's band. Really enjoyed that, but I was definitely fulfilling a remit and then extending it from night to night. Fred would respond to that, but it was starting from a point that was Fred. But in Japan, they said make it whatever you want to do, suggest to us ideas, so it was just fantastic. In a way it felt different for me there...I don't know how it felt for Brötzmann, for example, but he was happy to be there. Those Japanese gigs felt different for me. In a way they felt more for me like playing around here, I mean in this immediate [vicinity]...we've practically walked the diameter of the area I'm talking about. Down towards The Albany and back up to here...there's this whole scene, with The Centurion, where other things can happen, weird things with local poets, almost invisible things, just ways of developing ideas with people. Deptford Diaries, do you know that series? It was suggested that it should have that name because of the way it was funded, but it was people from around here who weren't musicians who were asked to help to work on a synthesis of how they would like to present themselves, their inner reality, to people, with music as central part of the performance, but not the only aspect, so this could include spoken

word, slide shows, bits of video...but working on a piece from scratch with non-musician people, coming up with a piece that varied between 15 minutes and half an hour, which somehow or other didn't explain, but was like snapshot versions of their life. Taking the life as the source material. That's the sort of work I feel I can only do around here because it doesn't seem relevant anywhere else.

EP Let's hear a bit more about Accidents and Emergencies [1996-1998].

CH I instigated and took responsibility for this series of events at The Albany, called Accidents and Emergencies. And it was quite psychically strong, to the point that...I've never been to hospital in my life, and within the run of that event I want to the A&E department about three or four times. And Pat Thomas was late getting to the soundcheck, because he fell off a bus and had to go to A&E. It was unbelievable! It was a weird curse! I will never go near that sort of name again! I've learned my lesson. The series was fantastic, it was a really ecstatic thing to do, and developed an audience around here and all the rest of it. But it brought on this weird psychic magic that we weren't in control of. It was really weird. Subsequently I went to Greenwich hospital, maybe three times within the space of two years. You'd go to leave, and see the people inside...and I thought, 'Where have I seen this before?' It was...airport lounges! You know when the guy wheels the man in the wheelchair in the airport lounge. That vibe...that sense...where do you want to go? I want to go to duty-free. Even down to the architecture being very similar. And the announcements, ding-dong! The whole thing. It's selling of the experience, more and more.

I did a one-off as part of a local Deptford Festival, which a fantastic Zimbabwean friend of mine helped to organise. He knew my work because Charles Bullen sometimes mixes for him. He knew what I was doing, and that I was serious. He knew I lived around here. Even though I was working with people locally, all of my music-making was in Europe, or some club in North London, or in Japan. People round here didn't know what I was doing. Phil Minton - nobody knew what Phil was doing. I said to Phil, let's play something around here. [He said] 'Oh know, I couldn't play in front of these people. They don't want to know what I'm doing!' But Pat Thomas wanted to do something. I said I've got this name, and he thought it was hilarious. 'Oh Charles, only you could think of a name like Accidents & Emergencies!' It sounds like we're all gonna go to hospital! We did one, and the guy who was the programmer for The Albany was up in the bar - loved it. Then he got me to do the music for an open air show. Just to see whether I was going to throw wobbles all over the place, or couldn't come up with [the goods] to a deadline, or whatever. He and I got along like a house on fire. He saw me about a month later. 'Charles, look, why don't you programme all the music at The Albany?' I said, 'I don't want to do that. You mean getting in people I don't like, or people I like but who are shit? You want me to get them some cocaine?! I'm not interested in doing that, but I am interested in producing very hands-on evenings around the continuum of A&E.' And he already wanted me to do that as well.

Every three months for two and a half years, I put these shows on at The Albany and I had a rehearsal space. People would come around a month before the gig in the dribs and drabs that they could arrange their lives around. I would try and make my space available, when I wasn't working. We used to get no money at all! £50 a musician. I would manage to cajole people and enthuse people into turning up to rehearsals. We would try things out, things would evolve. How to make instruments work? That bloke's an improviser, that bloke only does samples. We're gonna try it! So that's part of the 'Accidents' part of it all. You've got these amazing cross-pollinations happening. I'd annotate these, and find a structure for the evening, and we all would go with this structure, and that would be what the evening was. It was something like improvisation cum ritual cum structure cum traditional musics, all segued into each other. Not addressing a cognoscenti audience, but an audience of people who don't know what the hell you're on about. As opposed to people who know everything about everything. There would be a bunch of learning-disabled people that I'd got to know from another situation. Twelve of them would turn up with six or seven support workers, they'd ram two tables together, and have a little posse of these people listening to this weird avant-shit! I remember one night they started dancing to Steve Noble, John Edwards and Dean Broderick. Other people saw them dancing and thought, 'Oh! Hang on a minute, you can dance to this stuff!'

EP Try getting that reaction at the LMC!

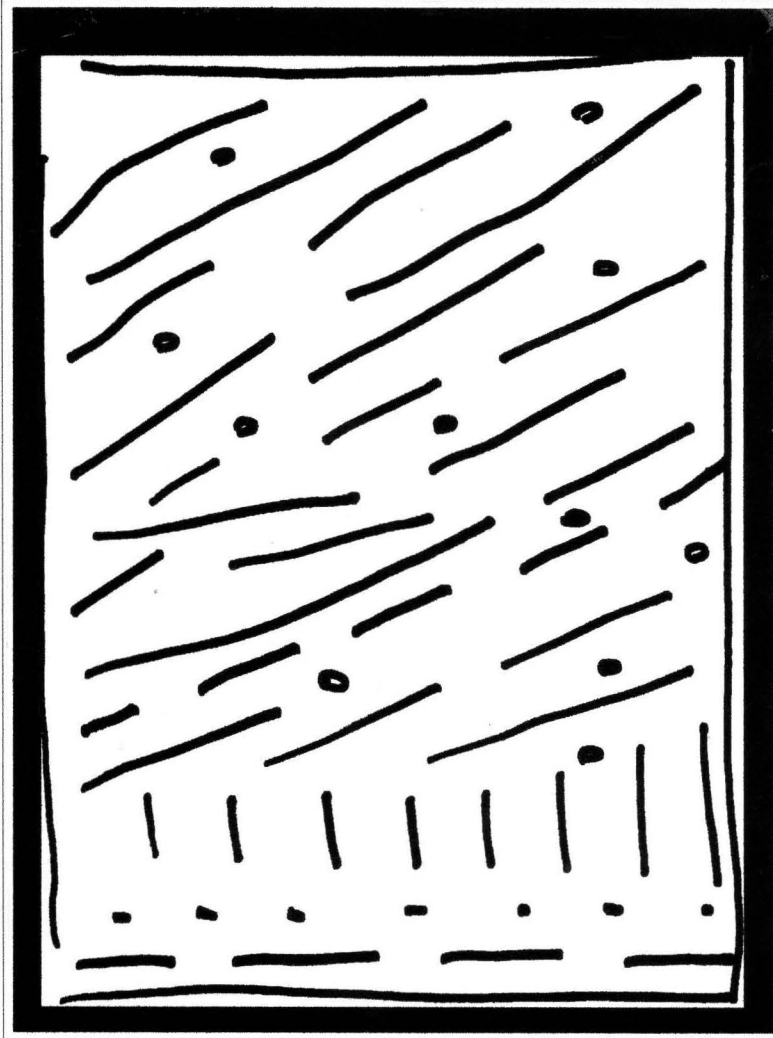
CH Exactly! Exactly! Try getting my dustman in that audience! But my local dustman came along to see me, because I'd taught his son, he knew me because I'd talk to him when he emptied my bin! I gave him a flyer and he came along. Later he said 'What the hell was that all about?', but he didn't feel cheated of his money. I said, 'We're trying to make a model of something else, and it means it's not gonna sound like what you already know, so therefore it's sometimes gonna sound wrong, but...' Charles Ives was in the back of my head, you know, all the right notes are wrong and all the wrong notes are right. 'We've gotta try and build something else. And yes, I love Marvin Gaye's *What's Going On*, and I know you do too, and we've talked about that. But this other stuff for me genuinely grows out of that as well. It's all part of the same thing. If you can't see that, then I'm sorry. But I know there's no animosity here.' So it was groovy, fantastic! I meet these people now and they say 'That's the guy who does the weird shit! But he's OK!' It feels wonderful for me.

EP Anything happening now that we should know about?

CH Well, my new album is called *Abacadabra Information*, and its gonna be out in the next couple of months on Locus Solus. It was done at the LMC studio, but I've only used these chance processes on live records before. This was a studio one, it was done using ProTools and it was interesting to do. Heavy challenge. Controlling the events, and yet at the same time not to deny myself the possibility of what it is to be in a studio. Very precarious. John Edwards is on one track, and I use a lot of tapes - some of those tapes have people...almost like casual situations that turn into something. I'm about to put a new group together. Ashley Marsh, who's an old friend of mine, with whom I've done several projects, and John Edwards the double bassist. It's gonna be songs and improvisations, and I'm going to try and open the songwriting out so that it's not all mine. I'm going to try and integrate some of the ideas from Accidents and

Emergencies into the group, so it's going to be less fetishistically closed and hermetic about who's in the group. So that when I play in other parts of the world and if someone's in town, we can actually assimilate a sax player for a gig for just one night. Much more able to adapt to situations than This Heat or The Camberwell Now. I've also got a big band that I'm putting on at The Centurion, a 20-piece band. I want the absurdity of half the space to be taken up musicians! It's called The Out Of Body Orchestra. It's also serving a function of being a social occasion, because a friend of mine from Japan called Akira Toyonaga, who helped me years ago to make the connections with the people I'm dealing with in Japan, and who comes over to London every year or 18 months, and he's got to know a few of my friends, local musicians, and there's been situations where they've played at my house or some of us got a gig together with him - well, I'm going to get all of together and we're gonna have this - almost like a concerto for electric guitar, but not quite...it's gonna be a piece that

has Akira Toyonaga as a running theme. But also - how many saxophones can you get going at once? Or what happens when you jump-cut numbers of different density really rapidly? That's the idea. And try to integrate dancing into that. There's this woman [at The Centurion] who just dances to anything! She's almost like a crusty or something, she's got big manic eyes and everything. Get her to dance. And maybe even do some of that myself, just because I've never done it, and I'm working a lot with dancers and they're always trying to get me to dance. And I do my own thing anyway. And they always try and get me to do their thing! Fuck off and leave me alone! I do this stuff where I crawl on the floor, swing these tapes around...if the music's groovy at a social occasion and it's hitting the right spot, then I'll dance to it, but the minute it's stuff I can't agree with...don't make me, just let me! I might do some of that, and also...liberate myself from the [drum] kit. Just like open the whole thing out, and learn from it. Also, just use this space just once to maximum effect.



I'm playing a solo gig at the 12-Bar, for Richard Sanderson's Baggage Reclaim. And I think Massacre, with Bill Laswell, Fred Frith and me, is playing at the Festival Hall in June. It's gone ape recently, because my educational work and my special needs work...I work at Goldsmiths, and I work with local youth projects. Everyone's saying these things can be separate and disparate and exclusive any more, and they have to come together. I happen to be one of the few people who (a) lives around here and teaches at Goldsmiths and (b) I work in a whole load of the youth and special needs projects, people on the outside rather than on the edge. And I've been doing it for years. So somehow or other I'm in a quite weird place, culturally, at the moment. And people are letting me know that. So a whole other aspect of my work is really taking off. And some of the students I work with have become comrades. That is being strongly approved of. And I was doing it before everyone was being told to do it.

You've said already how I need to make a rapport

with the audience. It's about forming a relationship. The work only kicks in with people after a while. No relationship is stable. It's almost like I feel about the modern family, it's like a mirror of the same thing...or an Australian soap, where people are always 'shootin' through'...everyone's in one end, and out the other. It's digested. It's not about forming relationships with the music, with an artist, with each other, with a sound, with a skill, with a technology - with anything. Everything's got to be just 'shooting through'. You go to some of these electronica gigs. The guy's got air fare from somewhere else to here, two nights at a hotel, cab back to the airplane, how many fossil fuels are being used in this process? Plus he's getting some money, he's getting prints being made up about him, he's doing interviews. Does his gig...and people talk all the way through it. And yet they were at the gig, and [they say] it was 'a great gig'. Yuppies grazing. Nobody's listening. It's about being seen. We're back to Restoration comedy time!

The Sound 9projector Ninth Issue 2001

Just one more thing I want to say. Einstein didn't complete his work. We came up with this whole thing of relativity, and we didn't put the smashed window back together again. He knew this idea of the unified field had to be done. And it wasn't done, because he didn't complete the work. And that's the work that has to be completed. We know this, and yet we're living in a world of relativity...based on incomplete work, which relates to gas-clouds some thousands of light years away. In a way, Newton describes the world better, in so far as it's the physics of the human scale. Einstein's physics is deep physics, and it's fantastic physics, but it's not necessarily of this gravitational pull, and this atmospheric condition, this level of temperature, or this state of entropy. His descriptions of more extreme states are NOT the human state. And we are basing our morality, our ethics, and our division of the world on fractured mathematics, [an equation] that has not yet been successfully resolved. And we even know that, yet we're basing our culture on this unfinished work. Yet the model that mirrors more successfully what we do is the one we've rejected, the Newtonian one. The Newtonian one isn't the truth, but it mirrors something more like survival than trying to be like a gas-cloud! If we wanted to do that, we'd be a dissipated form. But we're not, we're here - this stuff! Newton describes that more clearly, I think. I much respect Einstein, I think he's almost like a crucified figure in our culture insofar as he didn't finish his work. We've got to finish his work and bring it all back together again. He's still down in the hole, he hasn't yet ascended from death.

EP I don't know enough about Newtonian physics, or Einsteinian physics, to fully comprehend that.

CH If you're going to take Einstein's pictures of the world, then they are about huge distances. We're not working at huge distances. His theory of the world involved talking about high velocity. We're not working at high velocity. Newton's description of the world was a view that was enclosed, like a fishtank around our reality. But at least it was based around our reality! It wasn't an incomplete mathematics, based on a reality the other side of the cosmos. You can take Newton as a model for social unity. You can take Einstein's incompleteness as a model for social disunity, or disharmony. And the need to control

that, because everything's falling apart, by a centralised government. It sets up these oppositions. Another thing I want to say is that I sometimes think the world is run by numbers. And yet, at the heart of it, one of the [main] experiences is The Lottery. And there we make numbers into a random thing, for a moment. We get windows of randomness.

EP How is the world run by numbers?

CH Well, computers...statistics...all sorts of information. Even our appreciation of the physical world would have a lot to do with relating to numbers. It seems to me we use numbers to try and exercise control. And what I find funny is that once a week, on television, is this ritualised moment the balls come out in random sequences! We have this moment where random appears to be the centre of everything. All the rest of the time, [life] is about rehearsing things, or pre-taping things, all the rest of it. There's one point in the culture we let this weird bit of random in. We fetishise it into being photographed and broadcast. Really, we should let random be all over the place.

It's the same reason working with the sound I've got at the moment, in a way I'm trying to deal with two things at once, the way there's no synch-point in the [tape] machines. There are events that coincide at different lengths and at different places, because I'm standing at different points. There's an Einsteinian thing going on with the tapes, where there's definitely a Newtonian thing going on with the drums...pushes and pulleys and levers. I'm trying there to look at those two things.

Sources

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Impetus magazine 8 (1978)

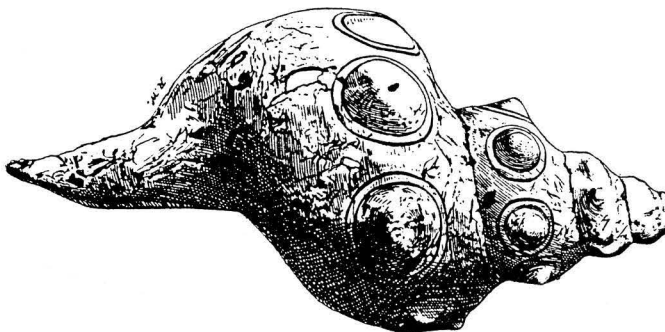
<http://www.freq.freemove.co.uk/hayward.html> (Very good website with an excellent Hayward interview)

<http://www.squidco.com/rer/Hayward.Charles.html> (Full discography)

WAR DRUM - La Quinta Trecena

Cassette C90 - 17 tracks

"All attempts to create a new man have failed so far. Perhaps our future chances would be better if man could recognise that he is still what he once was long ago, that his existence is defined by the past." - Walter Burkert,



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RECORDS ARE OUR BONED HAM

Amber Asylum The Supernatural Parlour Collection

USA RELEASE / RELAPSE
RR6472-2 CD (2000)

Amber Asylum is a strings-based group led by Kris Force (who has played on albums by Swans, Neurosis and Matmos) and Jackie Gratz. Though considerably more restrained for the most part, there is something of Swans' sense of coiled power and release on this, their fourth album. It's a bewitching mix of ethereal melodies, ambient textures and classical forms, with Force's violin and Gratz's cello lending the album a lovely chamber music quality.

The tone is set by the intriguing opener,

'Black Lodge'. It begins with a calm, almost military drum pattern, which is gradually bolstered by elegant string flourishes. As the track unfolds, the string sounds become longer and more drone-based. This basic structure recurs several times on the album, with Force adding chilly vocals to 'Silence of the Setting Sun' and 'Disembodied Healer'. The approach pays repeated dividends, as the strings, voice and percussion coalesce with sinuous grace. Elsewhere, Amber Asylum play chamber music of ravishing beauty and precision on 'The Shepherd' and 'Black Swan', the latter (an aria from an opera called *The Medium* by Giancarlo Menotti) adding a darkly mesmerising oboe melody.

The closing 'Black Sabbath' (a version of a song of that name by the celebrated heavy metal band) sees the band taking a different approach. The strings are looser, heavier and drenched in feedback. The percussive attack is frantic and delirious, while Force's voice approaches the scorching power of Swans' Jarboe. The track, like the album as a whole, is testament to Amber Asylum's success in fusing (post) rock and classical forms into an innovative and seamless whole.

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Family Fodder

Water Shed

USA DARK BELOVED CLOUD DBC 226
CD (2000)

Original core Family Fodder members Alig Pearce, Dominique Levillain and Martin Harrison are reunited in the studio with additional session players. I admit I've a soft spot for this band, and was genuinely pleased when Harley Richardson and myself had the chance to talk to Alig in his Brixton home for our first issue. This record contains some brilliant pastiches of dub music, with other musical pastiches (eg African guitar music on 'Women') thrown in. 'Deep Time' nabs the melody from Lee Perry's 'Revolution in Dub', while another is a straight lift of 'Little Red Ridin Hood' by Sam the Sham and the Pharaohs. The Family Fodder always did dub music pretty well for white boys - the flip side to the 'Savoir Faire' single is one of my faves. But having had 20 years to improve on their formula, they're still stuck in the late 1970s - and have all but ignored recent developments that build on dub (Kevin Martin's *Macro Dub Infection* comps for starters). The lyric about 'dancing with integrity' seems a throwback to 1981 and The Specials, who (according to the *NME*) were intent on realising a youth revolution in politics and race consciousness, through uniting black and white people on the dancefloor. Well, look around in 2001 and one concludes that something like that may have happened - but not quite the way that was expected! As Alig himself said to TSP in 1994, 'dub has totally shaped what everyone's listening to at the moment, all the dance music. The style of mixing comes from dub completely. It's probably gone in a direction that people wish it hadn't...'

Amongst all the witty and ironic love songs

here, I perceive a certain weariness, resignation and desperate attempts to be 'free' from the grind of the daily routine. The lyrics are lazy, and convey lazy ideas. The Fodder used to criticise this kind of zombified thinking, and the society that bred it, which is why I liked those early singles. 'My baby takes Valium', they crooned on their 2nd single; 'it's a bad habit she learned from her mum'. Now that half the world are trying to erase their problems through Prozac, that's a poignant lyric. And what's the best satire Alig can manage now? 'We're English, so distinguished...and we're on drugs!' croaks Dominique, with a loopy grin in her voice. This merely conjures up a banal image of UK drug 'n' club culture plucked straight from TV show *Around The World In 80 Raves*. I want to enjoy this record, but despite all their effort it still doesn't breathe the same critical spirit of Family Fodder I used to love.

ED PINSENT

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Department

This Is Tension Avenue

AUSTRALIA A LAB RELEASE LD-001
CD (2000)

Not a long recording - about 36 minutes - but this CD sure packs in more music than most others twice as long. After hearing 'Dementia', 'Theme for Department' and part of 'Detached', you feel as though you've been king-hit by a truckload of noise, voice recordings, found sounds, a string orchestra, piano pieces and huge dollops of mood. All arranged quite well, I must hasten to add. After these tracks, the music is more settled but still Department range across different

musical styles and approaches, often within just one track, yet the results never seem messy or chaotic, everything is clear and balanced. Much of the orchestral music can be bombastic, as on 'Chronological Display', or schmalzy-smooth as only strings (natural or synth) can be, to the point of sounding extremely cheesy. Department do not dwell too long over the twelve tracks, so the music doesn't sound as if it's being pummeled in order for an impression to be made on its listeners.

My favourite piece on this CD is 'Everything's a Blur', which is a sickly sweet and staticky-sounding piano tune wrecked by the miaow of a cat in heat. Some of the more laid-back among you may find this CD too busy and probably uneven. For me, there's more orchestral music than I can take; there's not a lot of manipulation of it. I would've liked to hear the tapes slowed down or sped up. If Department can do a wonder like 'Everything's a Blur', they could've done a lot more with the other music. At least, this is the kind of act labels like Fourth Dimension Records have been looking for if they only knew where to look - perhaps if they looked around in Australia, they would find Department.

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Storm Bugs

Let's Go Outside and Get it Over

UNITED KINGDOM SNATCH TAPES
TCH213 CD (2001)

Who remembers the great British cassette revolution? Well, maybe revolution's too strong a word, but way back in the post-punk wake there was a definite flurry of DIY

musical activity whose choice of medium was the humble audio-cassette. This genuine underground of home-tapers filling Jiffy Bags with their bedroom noises took the Desperate Bicycles' exhortation 'It was easy, it was cheap, go and do it' to an extreme conclusion. Often using homemade equipment, bargain-basement instruments or even no conventionally recognised instruments at all, the medium was ripe for both amateur flapdoodle and, if you were lucky, horizon-stretching experimentation.

I can remember eyeing the Garageland and DIY Corner cassette features in the (then) all-important music weeklies and wondering how to make a choice out of the hundreds of tapes circulating in this flourishing new network. With no recognised 'names' to use as a compass it was best to just take a plunge into the unknown, postal-order in your mitten. Snatch Tapes was born in 1979 as an answer to this consumer dilemma, compiling offerings by over 30 cassette artists of the time including The Lemon Kittens, Alien Brains, The N4ls and Storm Bugs.

It turns out Storm Bugs were Philip Sanderson and Steven Ball, a highly experimental duo whose work from 1978-1981 is selected on this CD, Snatch Tapes' first release in 20 years. Storm Bugs ingeniously exploited the distorted vibrations they could tweak out of domestic hi-fi gear. In their own words 'outputs were fed into inputs, records were literally scratched with a scalpel to produce stunted percussion tracks'. And lurking amid a tangle of tape-loops was their own Synthi-Bug, 'a short-wave radio which had been suitably disembowelled and rewired'. With such primitive resources it's clear there was some sharp creative judgement going on, because none of these ten tracks ever sound like two teenage herberts mucking around with biscuit tins and their Dad's stereogram.

There are superficial echoes of This Heat and early Cabaret Voltaire but the skilfully layered textures of wireless interference, manipulated voices and faltering rhythmic clumps do justify the claim to a unique Storm Bugs sound. It's a murky, grey, industrial sound very much of its own period, but that's not a particular drawback. The track 'Window Shopping' sucks you backwards through a time tunnel into the dawning Thatcher era, its chattering voices crowds of consumerist drones bustling through Oxford Street in the 1980 Christmas rush. A gold star to Snatch Tapes for disinterring this one from the ferric graveyard and even for retaining some of that authentic tape-hiss!

JOHN BAGNALL

www.stormbugs.co.uk

Guapo Great Sage, Equal of Heaven

FRANCE PANDEMONIUM PAN 041 CD
(2000)

In just over 40 minutes this London-based duo come on like all the hellhounds of Magma, Eskaton and The Ruins were hunting them down, driving them to some kind of East European world music hell where Romany saxophones and satanic moogs would forever enslave them into producing endlessly renewed, demonic redactions of the finest instrumental rock music heard in years. Phew. Enough melodrama, already. Recorded in their own 24-track studio, Matt Thompson and Dave Smith have written the next chapter of that high-energy, bass-and-drum-heavy (not bass 'n' drum, this is real bass and real drums) European rock music so beloved of us Zeuhl fans. For me, this succeeds where so many pretenders

falter - nowhere is there a sense of rock as chamber music, this is rock music first and foremost. The rhythmic obsessiveness and tritone harmonies are there, for sure, but they aren't afraid to break into Romanian-sounding, highly melodic excursions. As I've hinted, they also take The Ruins's approach to metal-sourced progressive rock to new heights - their magnum opus here is the 16-minute 'El Topo', which is one of those relentlessly unfolding rollercoasters of Euro-rock on a par with, say, side one of Magma's *Kohntarkosz* or Univers Zero's *Ceux du Dehors*.

These past months have been a journey of rediscovery for me: as you'll read elsewhere in this issue, Erstwhile have done it for me with improvised music. Guapo have done it for me with the ReR/Rock In Opposition axis. As one of the founding members of the Recommended Records

subscription series back in 1978, I've progressively (no pun intended) become less engaged by the material put out by Chris Cutler - since the early 1990s I've bought little of it, finding most of it sterile and experimental (in the pejorative sense of that word). Guapo have put fire back into this genre of progressive music that really progresses - I don't mean those Floyd and Genesis soundalikes. They've also put fire back in my belly. A band to be proud of loving. Please play in Edinburgh.

CHRIS ATTON

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Lesser Gearhound

UNITED KINGDOM MATADOR OLE
449-2 CD (2001)

Sigh. More blips and bloopers, more stealing chunks of someone else's music, stuffing it through gadgets and then asking everyone to admire your freshly-laid sonic turd. I don't doubt that time and effort went into this. There's clearly a dynamic to some of this material, it moves, it provokes a reaction. There's meat on the bones - albeit someone else's meat.

The problem I have is this: making 'music' this way is now too easy. Any bastard who thinks he can hold a tune is tinkering away in his bedroom and churning out CDs. And there is a part of me that really can't blame them. When you see some of the shysters who are paid thousands and get away with their 'appropriations' and guest DJ slots I totally understand the young blades who, when faced with a future in a call centre or slopping mochas in Starbucks, would rather get some gear and go digging potholes in the sonic highway.

However, the world is groaning under the strain of all this unnecessary product. The planet is in danger of tilting clean off its axis due to the sheer overload of CDs that NOBODY wants. This endless production is all well and good if the act of creation was catharsis for the artist (I really do heartily applaud anyone wanting to mutate beyond the form of spectator) but does it really need to be released? I'm sure I only get to hear a tiny percentage of this material and (I'm sorry to carry on like an old fart here) but it all sounds the same. It's just one huge blur of tired signals - like staring out the car window on a long drive down the motorway, focussing on nothing in particular. Now maybe that's a desired state of being for some? Maybe that's how people like to get off? But not me. I need a bit fucking more than what could be easily replicated by holding a radio next to a microwave oven.

So - 'Lesser'. The name certainly fits. He gets some points for occasionally degenerating into Masonna-esque blasts of painfuzz but lacks the volume and the Brontosaurus-sized nads to go ALL OUT like old Maso does. But then that attitude would never have got him signed to Matador, would it? Buy something else instead of this. May I suggest 'Z Rock Hawaii' or 'Funhouse'? You work hard for your money. Why waste it on inferior



product?

RIK RAWLING 12/05/2001

PO Box 20125, London W10 5WA, UK

Joe Musgrove, Michael Norris, Andrew Thomson

Flew Creaking

100% NEKKID/PLEASING EVERYONE
ALL OF THE TIME MUSIC NO NUMBER
CD (2000)

Flew Creaking is a recording of a live gig at The Railway Hotel, Woolloongabba (a suburb in Brisbane, Australia) made on April 7th, 2000, by three musicians who I assume were students at the University of Queensland at the time. The instruments they used were a PowerMac PC, a portable record player, a delay pedal, 2 radios and 4 tracks. One of the truly independent CD releases; it's not on any label at all (note there is no catalogue number). This CD will be hard to come by for most people; my copy came from Synaesthesia which is the Australian distributor for the kind of music you will find in *TSP*.

An early highlight is Track 3 which includes, among other delights, a loop of orchestral music (sounding like what I imagine is Chinese Communist orchestral music) overlaid by a loop of a woman screaming at the top of her voice, over and over. After hearing this, I knew it was going to be no ordinary recording! Track 4 has strange noises zipping about, as if someone was pulling giant zippers through sheets of hard plastic. The fun really starts on Track 5 with a voodoo-ish rhythm providing the background to abrasive bursts, explosions and distorted wobbles. The record player is put through a fair bit of hard labour - I dread to think of what the vinyl discs fed through the needle must have looked like afterwards and of how many such discs the lads used!

The ominous rhythm changes as we go into Track 6; one highlight is a series of high-pitched yappings bringing to mind an electronic pooch barking 'Woh-woh-woh!' Many other things are going on as well but those yappy accents are what I remember most. Track 7 is more chaotic and amorphous, and despite its 9 minute length, the musicians seem to be in control (some editing may have taken place after recording but the sleeve does not say) and the music is well-paced throughout. Track 8 is schizophrenic with doodles, bubbles, wobbles and other things flying at crazy tangents. Track 9 is another long piece (over 7 minutes at least) with samples of relatively recognisable material. Tracks 1, 2 and 10 are quiet compared to the rest, though there is plenty going on if the volume level is high enough. Track 10 features piano runs and pattering machinery.

As all the cuts are more or less formless, I prefer to listen to this CD as one continuous recording - there are no discernible breaks between pieces and many samples on some tracks continue into the next tracks. Some of the music is outstanding and there's a sense of humour throughout which you don't often

come across. There is always something happening and yet not too many things happening and baying for your attention. Pleasing everyone all of the time music!

JENNIFER HOR

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Vibracathedral

Orchestra

The Vibracathedral Drum Troupe / The Vibracathedral String Band

USA FREEDOM FROM NO NUMBER 7"
VINYL SINGLE (2001)

Worthy heirs to the 1966 John Cale drone mantle, The Vibracathedral Orchestra here approach the double-sided single with sublime literalness. Cultural pundits have snootily mused that what distinguishes artists from artisans is the inspired concept. Well, give these guys gold-plated berets because the conceptual simplicity of this 7" borders on the genius. One side is exclusively clattering percussion (The Vibracathedral Drum Troupe), the other rapturously humming strings (The Vibracathedral String Band). What more could you need? Hear it and you might wonder why people get out of bed to form four-piece bands or even sweat buckets to write 'songs'.

But don't let this talk of conceptual purity lead you to think Neil Campbell's gang are working to a rigorous minimalist system. It's evident from the sudden start of these sides that they're edited from long, linear jams that are ultimately as rock'n'roll as The Thirteenth Floor Elevators or The Grateful Dead. If anything The Drum Troupe side is the most transportational, with lovely silver tinkling flurries accented by deeper hollow rumbles: a celestial fire-engine rattling by with all its bells ringing. It's the complete antithesis to a crummy busker I saw playing an African drum in Liverpool recently. This pasty youth was thumping out some playschool rhythm, which by his 'sent' expression was supposedly trance-like or tribal. Of course it was about as tribal as Johnny Weismuller's rayon loin-cloth.

Happily The Vibracathedral Orchestra avoid regular or obvious rhythms yet still push you forward into seldom explored inner-regions. I can't wait to hear more. By the way, as for the artists-vs-artisans debate, Most other 7" singles this issue were inly permitted to enter through the Tradesman's Entrance.

JOHN BAGNALL

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See THE DRONING ONES section
for more by The Orchestra!

Gunter Schroth

Barcode Music

GERMANY ARCHEGON GON 1005 CD
(2000)

Another concept album based on the transformation of mundane electronic communication devices (cf. Scanner, Michael Prime, almost anything on Touch and Ash International). This, unsurprisingly, takes barcode readings as source material and puts them through various computer-based processes to produce a suite of rich, densely-layered electronic improvisation and compositions that are far removed from the beep-beep at your supermarket checkout. Perhaps to title it *Barcode Music* is to invest in it something of the extraordinary (you mean this is just the sounds of barcodes?) that detracts from its charm as electronic music per se. Perhaps it is making too strident a statement about how, from the banality of the commonplace - from commercial transactions in a digital age - we might compose something of great beauty? This is nothing like Cage's dictum about freeing sounds to be themselves, the sounds are too refined and transformed for that - they are no longer barcodes, neither are they the music of barcodes. That said, and despite the apparent lack of structure in many of these pieces which makes (even of the compositions) them rather rambling and poorly-focussed, this is a pleasant enough addition to the electronic everyday.

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Drowning in a Sea of Bliss



Andrew Cox

Hide

UK WATERCRESS
INTERNATIONAL CD (2000)

Andrew Cox has been doing things on and off, for many many moons. There was *Neumusik* fanzine, the group MFH, Pump (they had a great LP out on O Yuki Conjugate's label, not the Nigel Ayers version), and... ooh, loads of other things. I think he's even on some archaic Nurse With Wound record. One of my all time favourite cassettes is Andrew's *Methods*, dating from the very early eighties. It consists of lengthy pieces recorded live onto an old reel-to-reel using sound sources which are only rendered recognisable by their being named on the cover. Lo-fi it may be, but the effect is like finding oneself dosed up on benlyin in the middle of an expansive moorland with only the distant call of a barely audible ship's horn punctuating the indeterminate passage of time. Phenomenal!

I understand that in recent years he's tended towards producing lengthy pieces based around a single snippet of sound, time-stretched out to full CD length. I don't know if this is how *Hide* was produced, but consistent with much of his best work, it's very difficult to tell quite what went into its production. *Hide* is essentially 74 minutes of slowly shifting tonal effects. On a superficial level, it reminds me of that noise they always used to have whistling around the polystyrene rocks on alien planets in *Star Trek - The Original* (and faintly ludicrous) *Series*, but this is only because I've made a concerted effort to find some parallel for what this does to the speakers. Nothing really happens. You have to play it loud, because otherwise you won't even notice it's there, and its powerful simplicity is quite overwhelming after a while. At times it's like listening to a blank CD, with the music leaking through from some extra-dimensional space behind that normally occupied by notes and frequencies. Quantum theory has defined some truly weird shit, far stranger than

anything thus far invented by occult types or UFO cranks. Wave-particle duality. Super strings. Imaginary time. Dimensions above the four of which we know, which exist curled in on themselves, only at a subatomic level. *Hide* could almost have extruded itself from the tiny spaces where such things are screamingly ordinary, like an audio analogy of a world too tiny for us to see and too alien for us to understand. Again, phenomenal.

WAR ARROW

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Transgenic

Transgenic

USA SOLEILMOON SOL 103
CD (2000)

A full CD of Nigel Ayers demonstrating "what happens next in drum and bass". Or not as the case may be. I couldn't quite get the hang of the Transgenic single, until I ignored the distracting claim repeated above. The same is true here, and this is actually an extremely convincing disc once one's expectations are checked in at the door. Firstly, the packaging is great. The disc comes in a card cover sealed in a hazardous materials specimen bag. The usual sleeve notes come in the form of instructions, dosage recommendations, details for obtaining repeat prescriptions etcetera. Any significant traces of rock'n'roll drug-ism, or art-irony, have been flushed away with the used bandages and expired medication. There's no suggestion of this being chemical as in spacey and tripped-out. It seems more like some horrendously toxic product that has either been withdrawn from legal usage, or is used only as a last resort to treat the few conditions worse than its side effects. I love it - it's that same deadpan, or I suppose in this case, bed-pan humour exhibited in the declaration "contents may vary from those listed" on the cover of NE's *Drowning In A Sea Of Bliss*. Although there are a few drum and bass flourishes, the odd techno moment, none of this is done by conventional means. If drum and bass is Manet,

Transgenic are Picasso. Most of these tracks use rhythm as a foundation, but not as a rhythmic foundation, if you see what I mean. The beats seem to be there in order to focus the listener's attention, which, once fully engaged, will inevitably notice that although the drum programmes may be along for the ride, there's no-one driving. Like many of Nigel's greats, this seems to have evolved under its own volition, unstructured by conscious human intervention. What with the grinding non-sequiturs of bass noise, the squeals and virtual clanks, all reproduced in high resolution sound, Transgenic is a fitting sequel to *Spanner Thru Ma Beatbox*. It's the sound of techno after the extinction of the human race, the machines keep churning out the beats and the bass, evolving into degraded forms with an incomprehensible agenda that is quite unrelated to keeping people in cycling shorts bouncing into the early hours of Sunday morning. Funny how Godflesh have turned out to be Elton John all along. I think this is a cracker, but then how could I possibly resist an album which features tracks called 'Oligonucleotide', 'Chromosome Sequence', and 'World Bank Schistosoma'?

WAR ARROW

Hank & Slim

The World Turned Gingham

USA CACIOCAVALLO /
SOLEILMOON CAD 6 CD
(2000)

Rumours abound that this is actually Robin Storey and Nigel Ayers. Well, if so, how come all the tracks are credited to Hank Stermann and Slim Fenster, veteran musicians with a long and shared history described by the cover notes? Was it Ayers and Storey who, as the cover describes, in 1962, were unceremoniously fired from the Grand Ole Opry because 'all those electronic noises were scaring the cowboys'. Of course not. Ayers and Storey would probably have been toddlers at the time, so go on, smarty-pants, explain that one!

With the possible exception of a few Swans tracks, the influence

of country and bluegrass has had an unusually low profile within the sphere of ambient, experimental, and avant-garde music. Perhaps everyone just knew that whatever they tried would inevitably sound rubbish in comparison to the pioneering efforts of those latter-day frontiersmen Hank & Slim. Having come out of self-imposed retirement the duo now capably demonstrate why P. Orridge in Roy Rogers chic wouldn't have worked. The years clearly haven't dimmed the powers of these masters of the steel guitar and multiphased oscillator. Clearly the golden years of Hank & Slim had a profound influence on the music of both Nocturnal Emissions and Zoviet France, which probably explains those absurd rumours. This music is at times, almost impossibly rich and evocative, with all manner of lonesome strangeness going on amid windswept layers of electronic prairie. Slide guitars drift past like tumbleweeds, suggesting hidden melodies once plucked out around some distant camp fire. What seems to set Hank & Slim apart from those who dabble in less-countrified variations of this genre, is an expert ability to maintain the balance of mood. Although disorientating and electronic, it never once descends into doomy-noise territory. Rather, it captures, true to its roots, that wistful melancholia you only find in the best Slim Whitman or (post-teen idol) Ricky Nelson recordings. Although *The World Turned Gingham* is a largely instrumental album, it speaks volumes. Those forlornly echoing loops and treated samples could only have been crafted by men who know how it feels when your wife runs off with a carny roustabout, the dog takes sick, and you find a family of possums has taken up residence in your truck and eaten all the electrics clean away. An absolutely brilliant album, quite frankly.

WAR ARROW

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**Konstruktivists
Industrial Surrealist -
Musik Von Glenn Michael Wallis**

BELGIUM EE TAPES ET71 CD
(2001)

Don't be misled by the title. This shares little common ground with SPK or their spiritual successors. I'm not sure why he dropped the appellation NKVD for this release but it means that at least a few of you will recall him as the ex-Whitehouse hype man mentioned with puzzling infrequency in that recent and mildly diverting book about Genesis P. Orr - er about Throbbing Gristle. Glenn knocked around with them for fucking ages, even did some records with Chris and Cosey (in the days when anything bearing those names was guaranteed to be shit hot), and is a source of countless engrossing anecdotes about the fun and games had on the road with da Gristle. Still, his main thing has always been Konstruktivists, authors of *Psykho Genetika*, for my money one of the finest experimental electronic albums ever.

This fine disc collects various obscure tracks culled from tapes, compilations, and boxes at the back of the wardrobe over the years, dating from way back to the present day. If you have any time at all for Cluster, Neu!, Michael Rother or any of those other krautrock giants, you should definitely be checking this out. Instrumentally speaking, most of the tracks utilise old analogue synths and sequencers with some perplexingly inventive rhythms here and there, but on a sensual level the whole is far greater than just the sum of its parts. I understand our man was having a lot of heartache and unnecessary shit when he recorded tracks like 'Nekrolog', 'Tudor Forest', and 'Desire' (parts 1 and 2) and the surging and gut-wrenching emotions just bleed through the gaps in the delayed and modulated strings of notes. At times it's dark, but it remains beautiful from start to end. Glenn Michael Wallis is not only one of the nicest geezers you could possibly want to know, but he's had some shit to deal with of late so make him smile and buy his fucking CDs okay? And no, I'm not making this into a charity case - you really should be hearing this stuff!

WAR ARROW

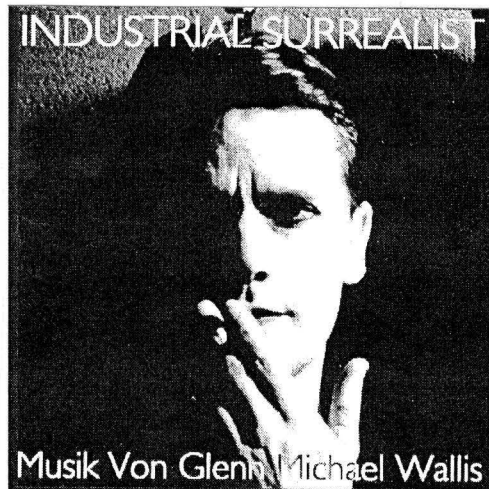
*Erick Van Havere, Clement Heirmanstraat
10, 9100 Sint-Niklaas, Belgium
Konstruktivists, 7, Folly Road, Wyndham,
Norfolk, NR18 0QT, UK*

Nocturnal Emissions

Zeneca / Monsanto

AUSTRIA EARTHLY DELIGHTS /
SYNTACTIC / KLANG GALERIE PE59 7"
SINGLE (2000)

You can't really blame folks like Konstruktivists or NE for producing these expensive and very limited edition things. It must be irritating seeing collectors forking out silly money for your old LPs, from which you yourself just about gleaned the price of a pie and some beers. Here we find NE on



more traditional ambieny-drifty type form, not to mention ripe fruit coloured vinyl. Nice. I'm not sure if this is an exceptional record, or that through being a humble 7" single, one's focus is more concentrated than would be with a 74 minute CD - whatever the case, it sounds good enough to stave off the pangs of regret at having to sell my botty down Piccadilly Circus four weeks on the trot in order to accrue funds sufficient for its purchase. Nigel, in this instance, seems to be on a bit of an Elgar tip, if the quietly emotive classicism of this disc is anything to go by. See kids, you can dig the classics without having to get toggled up in a stormtrooper outfit! If you're feeling rich, buy it, but don't wait around too long.

WAR ARROW

*Klang Galerie, PO Box 41, A-1124 Wien,
Austria*



Nocturnal Emissions

Rock & Roll

UK EARTHLY DELIGHTS 7" SINGLE
(2000)

Just when you think you've got them all figured out they go and do this. Milk white vinyl as thick as a pre-1930 cheese and tomato sandwich. Day-glo pink and yellow psychedelic cover with a picture of the King (Elvis, fool!) and a two part slice of...I dunno... rockabilly-trance perhaps. To transmogrify for as brief a time as possible into Jilly Goulden - sniff (waves hands around) I'm getting Eddy Cochrane, I'm getting cowboy hats and bootlace ties with just a faint essence of Alabama 3's 'Ain't Going To Go' - despite all of which it's still identifiable as Nocturnal Emissions, albeit with a tan and a big old bottle of gatorade to hand. This'd sound great blasting out of the stereo cruising on the interstate down to Houston, or something. Even after all this time, this guy is still pulling some pretty unusual rabbits out of his hat.

WAR ARROW

*Earthly Delights, PO Box 2, Lostwithiel,
Cornwall, PL22 0YY, UK*



Nocturnal Emissions

Imaginary Time '99

GERMANY DISASTER AREA /
EARTHLY DELIGHTS DA014 10" LP
(2000)

Fifteen minute disco platter of the live favourite. Not sure how well this would work in a club, but well enough I should imagine. It seems to have the bass and beat and sparsity necessary for rug cutting. Furthermore, it's jolly nice to come across dance music which takes inspiration from Stephen Hawking rather than UFO / pyramid type bollocks. My only reservation here being that while Hawking's imaginary time (which exists at right angles to real time and serves to explain why we are wrong to view time as something with a beginning or an end, purportedly) is a nice idea in terms of mathematics and philosophical constructs, I can't help wonder if it isn't, like much of the wackier bits of quantum theory, built upon too undemonstrable and hence flimsy a premise. Still, better than all the cosmic beats opening up your third eye drivel. The flipside tracks are nice too. Sparse abstract rhythms aimed more at the noggin than the feet which, although initially unimpressive, become quietly appealing after a few listens.

WAR ARROW

*Disaster Area, Tweehörnweg 61, D-26316
Varel, Germany
Earthly Delights, PO Box 2, Lostwithiel,
Cornwall, PL22 0YY, UK*



Keith Rowe

Harsh, Guitar Solo

GERMANY GROB 209 LC 10292 CD (2000)

Three long superlative tracks from the untouchable maestro of the prepared tabletop guitar Mr Rowe. A lesser man, gifted with the apparent fluency in noise-making that Rowe has, might be tempted to flood the market with dozens of CDs of this nature. But I think this is only his second solo release, the first since *A Dimension Of Perfectly Ordinary Reality*. Granted, Rowe has had a higher profile of late, with the MIMEO project (a large orchestra of improvisers, noise-makers and laptopers) and his work with Taku Sugimoto and other improvisers. But this abstemiousness probably connects to Rowe's sense of responsibility to the environment, or to the global economy; that same side of his conscience that recoils at the thought of musicians wasting money on buying a new instrument every year, when there are people starving across the globe. If you feel like that, why add to the world's glut of unnecessary CDs?

This same social conscience has fed into this *Harsh* project - which is a very *necessary* CD, I should add. He writes that 'a music that reflects something about the harshness of the lives of the majority of the world's people,' is his avowed aim here, and not just another improv record. 'Economic harshness, political harshness, cultural harshness,' he continues, confirming that this is modern protest music. Like Charles Hayward, Rowe's committed to raising the issues and asking uncomfortable questions, passing on the message through music that makes the listener feel uncomfortable. This is most clearly discernible on the second track, 'Very'. Rowe's righteous anger bubbles forth. It's a gestural noise, filled with sawing, scraping attacks against the strings, thumping the wooden body of the instrument, stretching the elastic until it snaps. Violent action-painting in sound. All of this is spat out against a continual background of pained squealing, discontented grumbling and pessimistic murmurs.

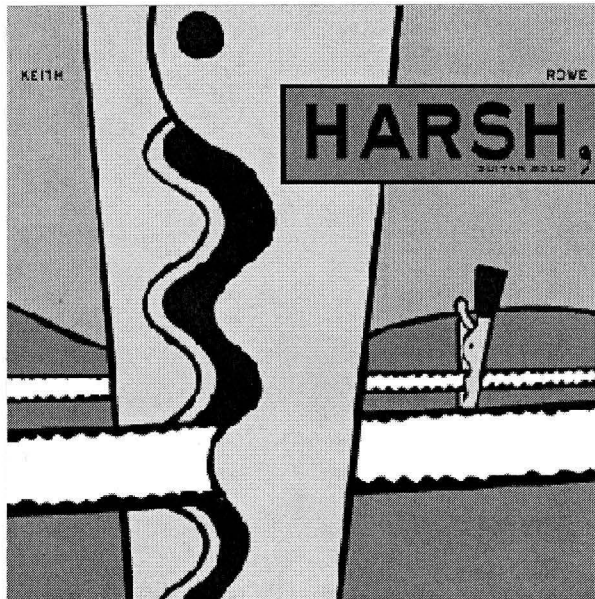
These gestural actions reflect Rowe's beginnings as a fine art painter. Come to think of it, his paintings also reflect this! A series of his Pop-Art styled cartoons (which have been spotted on AMM covers since the very beginning of that group in 1966) are here printed in their strong primary colours, not to decorate the *Harsh* CD but to explain it. Rather than elaborate for the thousandth time on how he prepares the guitar and what he uses to play it, Rowe has drawn elegant and compact cartoons of his hand-fan, the tape measure and spring inserted in the strings, a speech balloon (perhaps to designate the use of live radio while playing) and most impressively a close-up of the crocodile clips clamped on the strings. This strong image turns the guitar into a landscape with ditches, the clips like inverted fir trees. Apt, considering the way the travelling listener can wander in Rowe's spacious soundscapes.

And what unique vistas he carves. The first track 'Quite' is an industrial-styled landscape, a symphony of steel accompanied by factory chimneys blowing, buzz saws whirling, whistles blowing, all underpinned by an interminable and indistinct radio commentary. It might be a bleak portrait of 21st century westernised culture, in the advanced stages of decay. After the shrieking protest of 'Very', Rowe ends the set with 'Extremely', a completely abstract and very doomy dirge made of slow tuneless chimes, dark whirring, and clanking chains. It perfectly conveys his utter despair at the state of the world, his disgust at our collective apathy in refusing to do anything about it, and also presumably the freezing cold conditions in Köln in which he was playing. Recorded there on 30 November 1999. From the end of the last century direct into your hearts. Indispensable. Own it. Live with it.

ED PINSENT

Simon Görtz, Alter Kölner Str 10, D-40699 Erkratch, Germany
www.churchhofgrob.com

The Presence of a SOLID Body T R E A T E D GUITARS with ELECTRONICS



Oren Ambarchi
Stacte.3

GERMANY PLATE LUNCH PL
15 / AUSTRALIA JERKER
PRODUCTIONS SKUN 7
VINYL LP (2000)

Further bold solo explorations from this Australian genius, amply demonstrating how to expand and extend the range of the electric amplified guitar. Not via pure noise, not loud volume, not through improvisation alone, not through tabletop play, but using a small recording studio and highly original playing methods. He uses loops, layered electronics, and delivers quality work.

Both the pieces here start out in one direction, then shift dramatically at about mid-point, changing into something unexpected. Side A is a repeated three-note figure (speeded up, perhaps?), with overdubbed

super-fast playing, heavily treated. Then it becomes a single note of sustained, feeding-back intensity, throbbing sensuously like an erect organ, while caressed by the loving hands of some gentle 'riffing'. Side B features more live guitar, playing against an acoustic bass and a cymbal set-up, with Oren proving he can create a one-man, home-made AMM sound in the studio. This one's a cavernous scape, compared to the more introverted space of side A. The sound floats; the cymbals create a hovering sensation, while the bass underpins everything. It mutates into a single bass note, punched in and out with an erotic thrusting quality, while added backwards-guitar segments are layered on top, along with subtle pedal-effects manipulation.

Oren resists using effects for their own sake, however, and never allows anything to conceal his fine guitar skills. He uses guitar and studio simply as sound-generating units, and is deeply committed to exploring possible new horizons, new ways of working, in these areas. His discipline, restraint and craft is a rare thing. What's more, his music is always extremely sensual, warm and hugely enjoyable.

ED PINSENT

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Gerald Hawk

King of the River Canoe

USA ABDUCTION RECORDS NO NUMBER CD (ND)

Lonely folk, here's your perfect soundtrack to a brooding, bitter night of alienation, as you plot revenge on your foes and drink your poisonous alcohol to its lees. Let Gerald Hawk's chilling, breathy voice seep into your bones and crystallise the sound of your despair. You will sit there transfixed by the menace of it, the suggestion of backwoods violence lurking at every turn. The darkness of it will tell you more than you want to know about the depths of the human spirit at its meanest.

He's a singer and guitarist, one who's aware that in these cynical times, he's got to do a lot more than James Taylor and Janis Ian did some 30 years ago. Hawk is building, perhaps self-consciously, on the ears of a world already stained by the dark mutterings of Jandek, and more recently of Will Oldham. But he has developed an utterly distinctive voice, and concentrates more on malevolence, on brooding fear and terror, hoping by his scowling stance, his inept strums, and sibilant doom-laden whispers to exorcise some hideous personal demons who dwell in his gut. Some clever double-tracking of voices on the second track allow extra scary meanings and subliminal sounds to leak out, in this transcendent tale of a friend leaping off a cliff and drowning in a riverbed.

Weird tales, weird images, weird poetry.

No track titles. A few fleeting images from the Hawk lyric-book: *hiding in a dog costume...sexual envy...nights in the forest...playing with cannonballs...inside her vagina's a ridin' escalator...now she's a cyclops with one eye...*

But if words ain't yer bag, just skip to the final track for an intro of sheer moaning dementia. The nightmares induced by the *Deliverance* movie all coming true at once. This CD is a powerful recreation of all the malice and mystery of the most malicious, mysterious blues records that have been heard. And perhaps some ultra-rare, unknown, or suppressed blues records that only exist in the collection (or the imagination) of Gerald Hawk.

Released on the Sun City Girls label...Alan Bishop is thanked. For further info, try www.geraldhawk.com.

ED PINSENT

PO Box 9611, Seattle, WA 98109, USA

I'm Being Good

Sub Plot

UNITED KINGDOM INFINITE CHUG CHUG 15 CD (2001)

One of the UK's least known and perhaps best discordant heavy guitar bands, led by the multi-talented Andrew Clare - who yields the axe, renders his linear scrawls into Photoshop-artworks, remixes and presses CDs, and far as I can gather runs the Infinite Chug rekkid label also. This is an enjoyable record with some mighty blasts of uninhibited free-guitar playing, at least for the moments when they manage to overcome long tracts of sluggishness. Overall this is full of episodes of heavy riffing at a very slow tempo that, despite some strong melodies, doesn't quite take off like it shoulda done. Riffs are sometimes repeated just for their own sake - when they oughtta cut loose into a bout of free playing, the consensus remains that they'd better 'stick to the plan' lest they get lost - and the rhythm section accordingly drags us back to the leaden path.

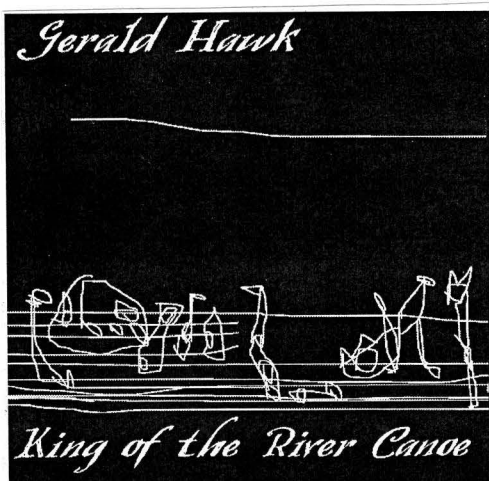
The voice parts are a bad idea too. I think I personally would prefer I'm Being Good if they remained an instrumental band, and forgot about the rather dismal attempts at songs - because the vocals are recorded here at such a weedy level, it sounds like an afterthought. Titles like 'Kill him with war savings' promise mysterious delights, only for their lyrical content to remain obscure, mired in the mud of the murky mix. However, the band - Clare, Samuel Dook and David

Ewan Campbell - have a fine rapport and instinctive sense of dynamics which bigger-name combos with lucrative record deals could learn a lot from. And I seem to recall from one of the rare occasions in the 1990s when I went to see a gig at a student union, that Andrew Clare's reliably very good in a live setting, so check out his band(s) live if possible.

Support your local indie band! CDs like this *never* reach the record shops in year 2001! Be sure to mail order this item, and other fine products, online from the website below.

ED PINSENT

14 Worcester Close, Langdon Hills, Essex SS16 6TW
www.infinitechug.co.uk



Steffen

Basho-Junghans

Inside

USA STRANGE ATTRACTORS
AUDIO HOUSE SAAH002 CD (2001)

This is a gorgeous record of solo acoustic guitar improvisation, by a mysterious German fellow who seems to have entered the arena out of nowhere. Quiet, but far from contemplative, because it won't really let you think - it insists on hammering home its point of view. This music uses very simple riffs in an obsessive, almost-merciless pattern of repetition; it hovers in the twilight between music played for private needs, and music for performance, with perhaps an element of a guy simply practicing his

scales. You can feel embarrassed listening in to something so intimate. This points to a true emotional depth and complexity you rarely find in music these days, and indeed (as Byron Coley perceives, in his sleeve note) a radical reinvention of the possibilities of the acoustic guitar.

Comparisons have been drawn with guitar records by the sacred cabal of American guitarists associated with John Fahey and his Takoma label. I mean Robbie Basho, and to a lesser extent Leo Kottke. Basho is a neglected weirdo whose playing derived partly from Eastern tunings, and he did it in a more convincing way than Davey Graham in this country, appealing though the latter is. I'm not musically adept enough to identify Eastern influence on Steffen Basho Junghans, but I don't sense the same interest in ornament, grace notes, and fluidity that the great Robbie Basho exhibited. What comes over more strongly is the obsessive quality of the playing, an urge to pull dark demons out of one's tripe, even at the expense of conventional beauty. In this way, I suppose Steffen owes more to Loren MazzaCane Connors, whose turgid strumming work I have yet to find a way into - but recognise he is certainly an original.

A stark and dark new genius of the blues who deserves investigation.

ED PINSENT

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Keith Rowe / Keith Cascone

With Hidden Noise

ANECHOIC A002 3" CD (2000)

A very beautiful and highly atmospheric recording from start to finish ... despite the flurry of activity with the almost subliminal recordings buzzing away in the background, the main impression is of a warm, fuzzy and floating drone embellished with Rowe's distinctive guitar treatments. One's only complaint is that at just over 19 minutes the piece isn't long enough - please, please, couldn't we have another 5 minutes of this exquisite and finely textured music? Next time, perhaps ... sigh ...

JENNIFER HOR

www.anechoicmedia.com

Charley Patton Screamin and Hollerin The Blues: The Worlds of Charley Patton USA REVENANT RECORDS [PROJECTED 7 x CD BOX SET] [2001]

This is welcome news to an avid pre-war blues fan like myself, who for years has been foolishly dreaming that the double-LP on Yazoo (L 1020) pretty much summed up the available extent of Charley Patton's available recordings. There are seven CDs to this planned Revenant boxed set, of which a promotional sampler CD has been issued. It was a life-long ambition of guitarist and blues scholar John Fahey to have compiled and issued this monumental tribute to the musician that many regard as the originator of the Mississippi Delta Blues. Sadly, of course Fahey died before the project was completed. But he has realised other projects through the Revenant label, of which he was an artistic director. *American Primitive Volume 1: Raw Pre-War Gospel* is one of the prime achievements of the label, 26 astonishingly powerful selections of earthy blues and gospel songs from 1926-1936, that unsurpassed era of America's musical history. Brilliantly researched by Gayle Dean Wardlow, and presented with lively notes by Fahey, the choice of music on that comp veers from fairly famous bluesmen, to utterly demented and badly recorded stuff like the Smiths, street singers from Chicago. It's also distinguished by the great high-volume remastered sound, incredibly richly powerful soaring monotonies that do the music the biggest favour its ever had.

Charley Patton was also on that comp, performing as Elder J J Hadley, singing both parts to his 'Prayer of Death' from the 1929 Paramount sessions. He was also there on the cover, his iconic photograph picked out with red and gold overlays, with a haunting detail on the inside. Jeff Hunt and Susan Archie must take the credit for realising these demonic visions of Patton. The packaging of these Revenants is sumptuous - and probably helps to resell country blues to a record-buying audience. It would be a mistake to neglect the great work of other blues reissue programmes though, which have been going since the 1960s and 1970s; and a large quantity of back catalogues remain constantly in print, even on CD, thanks to the efforts of labels like Document. But I like the Revenant approach, which as I say offers a superb remastered sound (expect to hear it throughout the Patton box, too), and through its research and choice of imagery does a lot to foster the mythic and legendary aspects of the blues, without neglecting the scholarly and historical side. The very name 'revenant' suggests a ghost coming back to haunt us, precisely the experience Fahey himself had from hearing a blues record for the first time. It was 'Praise God I'm Satisfied' by Blind Willie Johnson:

'The first time I played it, it made me sick...but the sound kept coming back to me. Five minutes later I just had to hear Blind Willie again. So I listened to it again and I started crying. I thought it was the most

beautiful thing I had ever heard.'

This box set will be definitive; 5 CDs of music representing the complete sessions (including tests and false starts) of Patton, with Son House, Willie Brown, Bertha Lee and Henry Sims et al; one CD of music by musicians who learned from Patton, or were within his 'orbit'; and a CD of interviews with his peers. In addition, Fahey's 1970 book on Patton is in the box, along with an obsessive collection of Paramount adverts for the records, and 78 label sticker reprints. Granted, a lot of this material has been available for a long time - and there are



cheaper sets of Patton's material on the market, but Revenant's approach scoops the prize for comprehensiveness, and for making a statement about the greatness of this unique American performer. Bluesmen should be given the same reissue luxury treatment as, say, Charlie Parker; I suspect that every recorded note Bird blew has been reissued somehow. Obsessive jazz collectors want everything; false starts, studio chatter, warm-up sessions, every single alternate take. This, as far as it applies to Charley Patton, will be the pattern followed on the box set.

Patton's sound will grab you first. A booming basso voice, shouting and hollering with earthy passion. It grows increasingly doomed by the end of his career, as is evident on his 1934 rendition of 'Oh Death' with Bertha Lee - his final session in fact. There's that sense of urgency and excitement you get with many blues records, where the song increases in tempo as the singer's pulse-rate speeds up. He just has to get the story down; his rate of delivery speeds up in sympathy with the action. You can hear this on Patton's 'Mississippi Boweavil Blues'. As to Patton's guitar playing, it's clearly the work of a seasoned veteran. Patton already had a substantial repertoire of tunes and songs, and a fully developed style of playing, by the time he first recorded. When he was first approached in 1929 by H C Spiers, Paramount's recording scout, he had 20 years behind him as a performer and entertainer, playing for local dances. By the time he gets onto record, Patton has an

incredibly inventive strumming and picking style, yet it loses none of that raw pounding force that he would need to make his guitar heard over the yawps and stomps of his dancing audience. In the liner notes to the Yazoo double LP collection of Patton's work, many blues scholars (including Stephen Calt, Nick Perls, and John Fahey) analyse Patton's guitar picking in some detail, pointing out the inventions and variations in patterns, use of minor chords, and even the details of sliding and thumb-striking actions. With a small repertoire, and with a music as simple as The Blues, I suppose it's relatively easy to pick apart the components. It need not spoil your enjoyment of the music. I'm less persuaded by the book *King Of The Delta Blues* by Stephen Calt and Gayle Wardlow, which goes even further into this area, appearing to try to elevate Patton to the status of a modernist composer.

Patton deserves some sort of accolade, however. Bluesmen led neglected, poverty-stricken lives for the most part, and belonged to a strata of society that was not even guaranteed the most basic recognition, let alone the 'immortality' of enshrinement in culture. The American spirit has been engaged for many years on a project of rescue and retrieval, restoring blues artists to their proper place in society. There is a universality to Patton's music, stories about misery, pain, loneliness and life, which start out mean and low but become distilled statements on the human condition. His song 'High Water Everywhere' about the Mississippi river flood of 1927 starts out local, and becomes general and symbolic - a commentary on all disasters, natural or otherwise. It's a commonplace, but the Blues is a unique form of American folk music, of which Patton was one of the grand forefathers and one of the most individual performers, and which has had considerable influence not only on other blues players, but on all American musical forms (particularly jazz, rhythm and blues, and rock).

However, if you really want to hear Patton's story told by a master, turn to Robert Crumb's illustrated story which appears in *Zap Comix # 11* (1985). This is a masterful balance of all the information you need - factual and historical, balanced with fanciful interpretations of blues myths which add significantly to the music. Crumb works from photographs of the old bluesmen with a penetrating vision, finding nuances of expression, light and shade in each image. He illustrates real and imaginary episodes from Patton's life with sympathy, and great economy. The darkest and most lyrical pictures result from his imaginative visions of the blues crossroads myth and a hair-raising visualisation of Patton's last session. Crumb's work reveals not only a master draughtsman at work, but also an artist who has considerable knowledge of blues lore and history, and someone who has listened closely to the music and been moved by it. Just like John Fahey, in fact.

ED PINSENT

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Muslingauze

Your Mines in Kabul
THE NETHERLANDS MUSLIMIM
026 3 x CD (2000)

Muslingauze

**Pays Tribute To The
Magic Of Paul
McCartney And Wings**
THE NETHERLANDS
MUSLIMIM / STAALPLAAT
MUSLIMIM 028 CD (2001)

Okay. It isn't really called *Muslingauze Pays Tribute To The Magic Of Paul McCartney And Wings*. I'm just mucking about. Rather daringly, it doesn't have a title. You see, the 'latest Muslingauze release', as the press-blurb informs us, 'will upset a few people, not because of its artwork, but because of the fact it has no title.' Yes. It upset me so much, I kicked the telly in, so be warned, those of you who are easily infuriated by albums which don't have titles.

The three CDs of *Your Mines In Kabul*, are nicely packaged. Great monochrome cover art, with titles printed on the case, and three discs inside. One is attached to the card cover by a wee rubber dingus, and one is trapped behind the plastic tray (it isn't a double CD case) so you have to snap the case open to get at it. Muslimim is a label set up to sausage machine the 500 further albums still waiting to be released into existence. Listening to *Muslingauze Pays Tribute To The Magic Of Paul McCartney And Wings*, I turned to the cover for information, only to find it relates not to the music itself, but ways in which you can pay to own more of it. Past releases are named, but (and here comes the choker) they're sold out. More releases are planned, but these will probably sell out on pre-sales alone. The answer to this misery? A subscription service, because, as it says 'this will be your chance not to miss anything!' Deep joy. Is it just me, or does this seem strangely reminiscent of those Franklin Mint things where unfortunate people are offered the opportunity to exchange large sums of cash for a unique set of hand-crafted collectable figurines depicting the complete cast of Laverne And Shirley? Where next, once the well of Muslingauze sounds finally runs dry in the year 2061? Action-figures?

And the music... so, how do you want it? What you want to hear, or would you prefer the truth? Okay, what you want to hear: Another rhythmic tour de force of intense atmospheric sound as Bryn Jones continues to explore the heritage and legacy of Islamic culture. No? The truth, then: You know what it sounds like. You know you want it, so give us the fucking money and put it in the collection with the others.

I can't see a lot of point in just repeating reviews of *Fakir Sind* and *Hand Of Fatima*, so for what it's

worth, here's more of the same. *Muslingauze Pays Tribute To The Magic Of Paul McCartney And Wings* is rendered mildly irritating by sounding as though it was recorded off a badly tuned FM radio. I assume this is deliberate. If your playing equipment has any intermittent quirks, this'll have you poking round in the back jiggling wires about for hours.

What little I managed to digest of *Your Mines In Kabul*, started off well. Good rhythmic stuff, and nicely put together. Well, that was a couple of tracks, after which it began to get all Fat Boy Slim meets Throbbing Gristle again, due to innovative 'crap quality' mixing. I began to lose the will to live, and turned it off. I still have some old Muslingauze records that I rate highly, but any more of this recent mush and they're likely to become a very much devalued currency. Could they not just re-release the stuff that wasn't shit?

WAR ARROW

PO Box 11453, 1001 GL Amsterdam, The Netherlands



Vibracathedral

Orchestra

Versatile Arab Chord Chart
USA VHF RECORDS VHF#48 CD
(2000)

Chock full of edits, this rek's nine tracks of live no-overdub droning improvs are all spliced together end-to-end to form over an hour's worth of continuous, harmonic musical pleasure. Sorta like the lo-fi equivalent of a Jive Bunny record. As you all know, this Leeds-based quintet of acoustic string, woodwind and percussion players (who play music in between their day jobs at the rubber duck factory) exhibit little difficulty in delivering music of this standard almost to order; it just seems to flow directly out of them, without any agonising. Hence there are a lot of live shows going on in their scene, and a sizeable discography to investigate. The 'Arab Album' (as I predict it will become known, when collectors and other fools who missed the boat suddenly 'discover' the recordings of the Orchestra and, like Sun Ra collectors, start to develop a silly 'insider' language to describe their finds and alienate the rest of us) shows that 1999 was a pretty fertile year for these fellows; if they'd been Mid-Western farmers, they'd be boasting of their rich harvest to their families, gleefully yelping 'The Zucchini's in!' as they tote an oversized vegetable into the farmhouse.

The listener to this disc is rewarded with a treasure trove of healthy, life-affirming pleasures. Besides inducing an enjoyable hypnagogic trance state (and far more reliable in this department than a litre-load of Night Nurse), this Arab record boasts a few raga-like 'Eastern' rhythms that the Hour'ied stranger on the front cover could probably use as she dances that infant tango in the spice markets of old Nepal, with many a warning cry of 'new lamps for old!'. It also

sounds perfect; it's one of the clearest, most audible recordings yet produced by the Orch, some of whose back catalogue has suffered from slightly muddy vinyl pressings. Another reason everyone should own a copy is for all the echoes of Beatles recordings that run through it, like stripes through a tube of Colgate. I mean the very best of The Beatles; one track could easily be a distillation of 'Tomorrow Never Knows', without the stupid vocal bits, concentrating on the fantastic Richard Starkey drum pattern and tape-loop drones of the original, rebuilding their essence in acoustic mode. Other non-intentional quotes of George Martin's string arrangements for 'Strawberry Fields' or 'I Am The Walrus', crop up on occasion, though you need fairly swift attention skills to catch them. The guitars imitate that wonderful chiming of sunshine-psychedelia so prevalent on the best tracks on the *Revolver* LP. Yes, this record can out-psyche the best of them for my money.

This magazine is in fairly regular contact with Neil Campbell, one of the principal players in the Orch, and we hope soon to meet up face to face with these five and record an interesting interview for your elucidation.

ED PINSENT

PO Box 7365, Fairfax Station, VA 22039,
USA
www.vhfrerecords.com

Neil Campbell Muttertown Birdsong Cindy / Mizzlefield Ploof Kingdom UNITED KINGDOM NO LABEL NO NUMBER 7" SINGLE (2001)

Another limited-press single by North Yorkshire's most prolific performer, and most prodigious collector of fine china. He uses his priceless ceramic collection here to realise a slow drone coupled with a fast one. The fast one is like spinning steel saucers in a playground, perhaps assembled from a few handy tape loops and metal objects ground with machinery. It suggests shapes of a perfect geometric harmony, an abstract division of physical objects sent marching into the world with a mission to fulfill. Perhaps indeed to conquer the mizzlefield ploof kingdom, wrest it from the despotic control under which it has suffered for too long. The slower side, recorded in Michigan in 1999, has the effect of a powerful magnetic whirlpool filled with a few tons of iron filings. It benefits from a transparent technique, adding barely discernible documentary tapes of speech and background noise, which adds just the right element of mystery to the short episode. But there's humour too, I suppose, because wasn't Cindy Birdsong one of The Three Degrees? Shimmering lo-fi harmonics abound on both sides of this blackly-wrapped, funereal and discreetly anonymous disk. Heaven knows how you'll ever secure a copy, but keep checking the lists...

ED PINSENT



Vibracathedral Orchestra My Gate's Open, Tremble By My Side USA ROARATORIO ROAR 02 LP (2000)

Again, a Beatles influence is noticeable on the clear-chiming, vox-amped Gretsch guitar on Side One, its player picking out single notes from a chord cluster and emulating George Harrison in 1966 to a T. Alongside, a horse-back riding violin and strumming acoustic guitar chop away while clouds of brushed percussion supply a low-end of rich purple fog. Plus the rattling of the fine china collection and occasional clarinet blasts which elevate this minor-key epic to another level. On side 2, it's a more formless swirling disc of sound, the players achieving that Nirvana state where all the individual parts melt into the whole. The great dissolving. Then a snare drum comes in and almost transforms it into a marching tune. The players cannot help but swing in time to its beat. Another excellent LP with a handmade sleeve.

ED PINSENT

PO Box 300574, Minneapolis, MN 55403,
USA



Birchville Cat Motel Jewelled Wings USA FREEDOM FROM NO NUMBER VINYL LP (ND)

A fine record where Campbell Kneale, the New Zealander main-man behind the Motel, is joined by Kieran Monaghan and Bill Wood. Together, they perform two sides' worth of glorious, turgid monotony. The A-side finds them in pursuit of a single note, relentlessly chased after by a wayward stringed instrument, and supported in the hunt by plucks and squeals and doomy rattling percussion in the background. A bit like exploring the inside of a beehive when the bees are away on holiday in Greece, and you can examine the hexagonal structures of each cell at your leisure. And all the while you're covered in honey, a feeling which this glutinous, slow-moving performance conveys accurately.

The B-side is more restless and the players try to do more - making it less focussed, but in some ways more texturally interesting. I think the methods used are mostly acoustic, perhaps involving the abuse of stringed instruments or bowed cymbals, but no clues are given (they did use crystal radio sets on the last BCM release I heard, on the Drunken Fish label). The effects they achieve are distinctive and powerful, and their group playing is on the mark more often than not, thus lifting this music above the herd of average droning ones.

ED PINSENT

PO Box 582391, Minneapolis, MN
55458-2391, USA
sonitus7@juno.com

Jonathan Coleclough Period USA ANOMALOUS RECORDS NOM 4 VINYL LP (2001)

Two long beautiful pieces from this talented English musician / composer. He released *Windlass* in 1999, an epic voyage into the heart of a siren-like drone. The piano side 'Period' is much calmer than that tempestuous release, comprising a repeat-structure of a few simple acoustic piano notes against a soothing organ backdrop. The flip side 'Periodic' is a much more complex and extremely slow-moving drone, something which would not have felt out of place on the *Isolationism* compilation.

Coleclough often works with a very simple and small sound source (something as basic as a metal scrape), but through intensive reworkings inside his computer these sounds build up into something gigantic, as wide as the horizons in Montana and as deep as the Grand Canyon. The computer is used merely as a processing tool; there's nothing in the end product that resembles the usual harsh digital effects we sometimes associate with that area of working. Rather, Coleclough's sounds are 100% human, deeply moving, and apt to mesmerise you in such wise that, like the couple photographed on the cover dwarfed by a magnificent landscape, you will want to pause to take stock of the vastness of the world and everything in it. Humbling.

ED PINSENT

Anomalous Records, PO Box 22195, Seattle,
WA 98122-0195, USA
www.anomalousrecords.com

C-Schulz and Hajsch C-Schulz and Hajsch GERMANY SONIG 13 CD (2000)

A rather nice showcase for the harmonium of C-Schulz, who drones away pleasantly and slowly on every other track on this short CD. Full marks for electing to play and foreground such a fine venerable instrument, which sounds splendid and requires a lot more manual and pedal effort than punching presets into a Midi-compatible keyboard. Plus ten bonus marks for steering clear of the doomy 'Nico' sound often associated with the harmonium. On this CD, a fine mix of acoustic and electronic music is arrived at through added effects, noises, and field recordings dropped in. With special guests who add wind instruments, extra field recordings, and most notably 'window shades' on the ninth track. I have no idea how you can play a window shade, although several of my colleagues in the office will testify how hard it is to open them once the window cleaners have been in. Intrigued? Then look for this CD, identifiable by its unusual photo cover - a snowball which seems to have picked up impressions from a crumbling brick wall and looks like a contorted, moaning face.

ED PINSENT

Kleiner Griechenmarkt, 28039, 50676,
Cologne, Germany

VOLUME CONTROL

Book reviews

Necessity is...The Early Years of Frank Zappa and The Mothers of Invention

By Billy James

UK SAF PUBLISHING (2001)
ISBN 0 946719 14 4 160pp
£12.99

Here's a quite useful book which traces the history of all the sidemen who ever played as The Mothers of Invention in Frank Zappa's bands, from the early 1960s onwards; and follows their musical careers afterwards too. Billy James pasted it together using a selection of original interviews he made in the 1990s with members of the band. They reminisce, share their fond memories; and though there are tensions, the book is not an attempt to bad-mouth the domineering character of Frank Zappa. So it's a warm and chatty book, quite short, easily read and very entertaining. No index, but a comprehensive list of tour dates, and obsessive discographies for all dramatic personae.

The Mothers of Invention were all disparate and strong personalities, with varying degrees of musical ability and fascinating back stories. Jimmy Carl Black and Roy Estrada existed on the margins of society in 1960s California, hanging out with the 'freaks'. They started an RnB band in the early 1960s called The Viscounts, which became The Soul Giants when singer Ray Collins joined. It was this combo which eventually became The Mothers when Frank Zappa arrived from his studio in Cucamonga. A control freak from the very start, he immediately insisted that this band start playing his compositions.

The Mothers started to mutate as a band as increasingly wild and talented players were recruited, and they picked up diverse influences from jazz and modern composition. Don Preston and Bunk Gardner both came from the fringes of the West Coast jazz scene, with interesting careers behind them. Don Preston, keyboard player in The Mothers, played in an army band during the war, toured with Nat King Cole, and also picked up influences from modern composers. There was always this dichotomy between members of the band who could read charts and sheet music, and those who were more - erm - intuitive and had to learn it by rote. No prizes for guessing which kind Zappa preferred. When Ian Underwood arrived, Zappa had perhaps found his perfect foil - an improviser who could 'blow his notes' and read sheet music effortlessly. No wonder he retained him to record *Hot Rats*.

Early on, the book attempts to describe what being a 'freak' meant in early 1960s society, a fascinating sketch I feel could do with



expansion. Zappa immediately 'codified' a way of 'Freaking Out', wrapping words around a social phenomenon, used it as the title for the first double LP Mothers release, and thereafter developed the stance of non-conformist behaviour into a weapon with which he could attack the complacent young audience. The positive side of this is that Zappa invented zany roles, routines, characters and sketches which the Mothers could act out on stage and on LP. Even today, Jimmy Carl Black can't shake off the 'Lonesome Cowboy Bert' persona. Zappa incorporated personality tics and throwaway remarks from the Mothers directly into the work, composing songs out of phrases, putting studio banter on the LPs. The Mothers of Invention developed a form of dada rock theatre, with strange puppet shows, comedy routines, stuffed animals, baby dolls, ritualised fruit and vegetable abuse. It would sometimes (as it did once in Berlin) shock the audience into revolt, something which seems unthinkable today.

The negative side is that he wanted musicians who could perform his work flawlessly, and while he encouraged and developed their improvisational skills, he felt disappointed by their ineptitude

ultimately. A lot of this story is well-known already, and the more it unfolds the more the figure of Zappa dominates the picture. It becomes more about his studio-bound approach to making music, and although the Mothers have interesting fragments to say about their parts in making each LP, it's clear that Zappa saw them simply as pawns. In 1969, he decided that supporting them was too expensive anyway, and unceremoniously dropped the original band of crazies who had given his music that extra edge of unpredictability. No subsequent incarnation of The Mothers would ever work as successfully again. Their asses still rankle, and who can blame them.

After 1969 the book portrays the not-very-interesting phase of another bunch of Mothers of Invention through the 1970s. But the legacy of Zappa and The Mothers is not with these grand old men. It's in stuff like *The Simpsons*. When he toured colleges, Zappa used to lecture the hippy students (whom he hated anyway) to become lawyers, or get into the movie business. The youngsters hated that message, thinking that spelled 'selling out' to the same materialist values as Mom and Dad. Matt Groening however listened to Zappa's advice - 'go to the library, don't take drugs'. And now? Although there are no exact parallels, *The Simpsons* might be said to have captured the brilliant non-commercial conundrum of The Mothers of Invention, and turned it into a major bucks-earner for the Fox Network. A shame that the lives of these poor freaks had to get wasted in the process.

ED PINSENT

Songs In The Key of Z: The Curious Universe of Outsider Music

By Irwin Chusid

UK CHERRY RED BOOKS (2000) ISBN
1-901447-11-1. 271 + [xxx] pp. £11.99

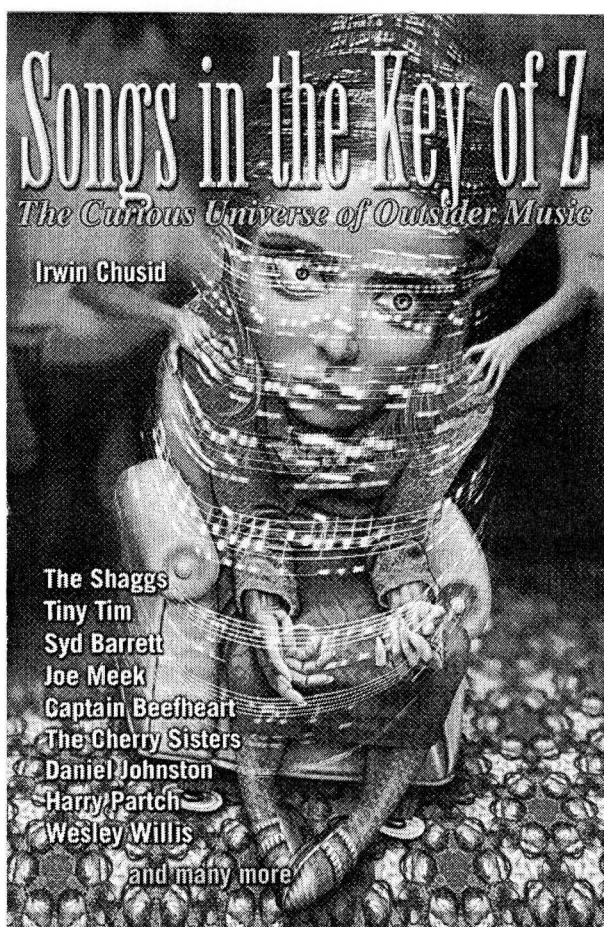
Oddly enough, as I went to buy this at my local bookshop, I found myself obliged to explain it to the young chaps behind the counter who looked fascinated and wanted to know what it was all about. I'd already read one review, but even so was surprised at how much fore-knowledge I had about the 'curious universe of outsider music', how I was able to sum up in a sentence or two what the term meant when applied to music, and to give examples of what its characteristics were.

I say this just to indicate that no matter how 'far out' you may think your tastes are, someone's been there before you. You think you've discovered something so obscure and cultish that you're the only one who knows about it? - forget it. These days, everyone knows about everything - there's already a T-shirt, a fan club, a CD reissue programme and a website. Don't think I personally object to this, but I have met people who enjoy the thrill of hunting down some rare 'undiscovered' species of far-out music, only to wallow in the glorious adolescent pleasure of keeping it all to themselves.

Irwin Chusid, gramercy, is not such a man. He's an American enthusiast and record-collector who's been promoting all manner of exciting and great music for years, through his radio shows on WFMU in New Jersey, through projects like the Raymond Scott reissues in the mid-1990s (for which he prepared slide lectures and addressed anyone who cared to listen), and sleeve notes. Now he shares the wealth, allowing us a sumptuous rummage through his own archives and collections, and those of other hard-core collectors, and cobbles together as much as he knows inside this book. There is also a CD collection available separately, with samples of the very music he describes.

There are twenty chapters, each devoted to the life and works of a certain musical 'outsider' from the history of music - mostly within rock music, but I suppose that's inevitable. The 21st chapter is a round-up of yet more obscurities and phenomena which Chusid knows about, but couldn't find time to write about in more depth than a tantalising para or two. This is one heck of an addictive read. I polished it off quickly (his chatty writing style is easy to digest), by starting off with the chapters of those people I'd heard of, before proceeding to the less well-known realms. The term 'outsider' here has an exceptionally elastic definition, and that's not worth debating here - suffice to say I've more patience with an entertaining and sympathetic book like this than I have with The Barbican's notion of what 'outsider' means.

There are excellent chapters on The Shaggs, Tiny Tim, Joe Meek, Daniel Johnston and Jandek. I thought I 'knew' some of their stories, but I didn't - there's a wealth of detail, facts and anecdote here. The Shaggs story is fascinating and evokes a combination of pity and compassion; they truly were a 'pathetic' band. Tiny Tim's extraordinary upbringing, and his role as an archivist of lost American songs, opened my eyes. Joe Meek's tale has already been told (very badly) by John Reptsch, so it's refreshing to hear an American slant on this most English of emotionally-constipated misfits. With Jandek, Chusid may go slightly over the top in emphasising the alienated driven qualities of this very



singular guitarist-singer's work. What's interesting is that Jandek might be the only real outsider artist in the whole book, an angle which Chusid doesn't explore.

The more obvious choices include Syd Barrett, Captain Beefheart, and The Legendary Stardust Cowboy. The first two have had a lot of ink spilt in trying to unravel their mysteries, and no more need be said here. Further down into the strata, we find street singers and mentally ill people, strains 'fathered' by Wild Man Fischer and Daniel Johnston respectively. There's Jack Mudurian, the Duplex Planet refugee who knows thousands of popular songs and sings them all at once. There's Wesley Willis, the fat Negro street soul singer who claims to have written an enormous repertoire of 35,000 original songs (all of which sound amazingly similar). The Song Poems chapter is interesting, but simply describes a phenomenon whereby would-be poets submit their work to mail

order companies; Chusid interviews a guy who had the chore of setting such doggerel to music.

There's an odd excursion into the dawn of popular song - the touching story of The Cherry Sisters, an early music-hall act who didn't realise they were atrocious singers, and were routinely booed off stage - and were so full of pious self-worth that they didn't care a darn. There's the Swedish Elvis impersonator Eilert Pilarm, and the accordion-playing space cadet Lucia Pamela - whose story frankly beggars belief. And lest you think it's all about lowbrow and popular music, there are two 'outsiders' plucked from the higher echelons of fine art music - Harry Partch, the 'maverick' composer, and the intense jazz composer Robert Graettinger, who did the one-of-a-kind *City Of Glass* record with Stan Kenton.

The only slight drawback I can find is that, despite having amassed all the information and sources, Chusid still struggles to put the music into any meaningful context, other than the fact that he likes it and it's made by 'outsiders'. Indeed, he even feels compelled to explain himself to some extent in the introduction, stressing that he is not being patronising to 'freaks' or outcasts of society as he savours each delicious twisted thrill provided by their bad-nice art. He needn't worry. He genuinely loves all this stuff, and he even manages to provide a compassionate, inclusive framework which allows us to welcome these people back into society. He's not on a competitive project to

out-weird the reader, as I suspect the *Incredibly Strange Music* books are (which is why I refuse to own copies of them). It's all fascinating stuff, and what's more it's beautifully illustrated with photos, unbelievable album cover art, and cartoons; there are contact addresses, websites, discographies and a proper index. Chusid's enthusiasm is infectious, and if you want a good entertaining read about this area of music, then look no further.

ED PINSENT

Various Artists

Relay Eight

UNITED KINGDOM 2:13 MUSIC 2:13CD011 CD
(2001)

A marathon session from 17 players, including Phil Durrant, Gail Brand, Rhodri Davies, John Butcher, John Bisset, Mark Wastell, Phil Minton, Pat Thomas, Charlotte Hug, the Bohman brothers and many more. Every year a batch of UK improvisers meet up and do simultaneous live improvisations in separate locations across London. They hand over the performing 'baton' to new arrivals who join in the groups, allowing others to drop out. This way they achieve hours of continuous playing to match anything Roy Castle attempted in *Record Breakers* in the 1970s. At the same time, they take improvised music outside of its usual locales and bring it back into the community. This community aspect is demonstrated in the mini-Millennium dome project involving local Greenwich schoolchildren, documented here by sound and image. And it enlivens the music to see and hear it outside of the familiar restrictions of a venue, club or performing stage.

This 2000 event is part of the Stoke Newington midsummer street festival, so there's a friendly, informal atmosphere which has translated directly onto the CD. You hear the background chatter of the audience, the sense of a summer jamboree of music, the relaxed comments of the players to one another, and even a moment of audience participation - where a Rastafarian starts performing an impromptu toast into a nearby mic, only to find himself sampled electronically into the body of the improvisation. Musically, there are all sorts and styles of playing on offer - from jazz to free playing to tunes, from acoustic instruments to electronic processing, from manic scratchy strumming to quiet, droning sax blow-fests. The textural changes and shifts in acoustics, all helped by the different on-site recording techniques, are really quite astonishing. A lot of good playing - just because the circumstances were conducted in a party atmosphere, doesn't mean the music isn't serious, or lacks tension.

The only thing that slightly mars my enjoyment of this CD is its faint aura of smugness, and self-indulgence. There is a tad too much of the 'insider' chatter recorded here, which gets in the way of the music sometimes, and which anyone outside the clique of (mostly London-based) musicians might not understand - and may even find a bit annoying. One wonders however if this CD (or even the music it documents) has much of an audience outside of this insider clique in the first place.

ED PINSENT

139 Gibson Gardens, London N16 7HH
www.2-13.co.uk

Clarence Palmer

Eggs

UNITED KINGDOM INFINITE CHUG
CHUG14 CD (2000)

A good recording of five UK improvisers; they originate I think from an Indie-ish background. Andrew Clare has however been associated with XIII Ghosts, and thus with UK improviser Alex Ward. Clarence Palmer's combined sound is pretty distinctive, and even eerie at times; whines, whistles, scrapes and lots of spacey dynamics. Electronics, guitars, synths, percussion, woodwinds and effects are all used - extremely sparingly - within this respectful climate. Clarence Palmer are five gnostic sleepwalkers, who meet up every night in a secret underground chamber, there to compare notes from the pages of their brain-books, which are filled with surrealist images and automatic writings. They delight in the free association of ideas, and improvise only with the proviso what everyone should allow space for each other; no fair all talking at once.

This strategy creates a disconnected feel and adds considerably to the strangeness of what is already a strange set of recordings. The effect on the listener should be suitably unsettling. Ultimately, however, the record remains largely unsatisfying. It's a bit too insubstantial, and meanders more than it coheres. But Clarence Palmer do have their moments where they catch fire.

ED PINSENT

14 Worcester Close, Langdon Hills, Essex
SS16 6TW
www.infinitechug.co.uk

The PHANTOM OF LIBERTY

VHF

Extracts

USA ERSTWHILE RECORDS
ERSTWHILE 001 CD (1999)

Thomas Lehn / Marcus

Schmickler

BART

USA ERSTWHILE RECORDS
ERSTWHILE 012 CD (2000)

Günter Müller and Lê

Quan Ninh

La Voyelle Liquide

USA ERSTWHILE RECORDS
ERSTWHILE 010 CD (2000)

I've said this before, but it remains true: Erstwhile have single-handedly breathed new life into improvised music. This wee American label devoted to the genre has in its short life assembled an impressive roster of small groups, some of whose members will be familiar to those of you who, like me, have been following the European improvised music scene for many years. My involvement (as listener, writer and performer) goes back to the eighties where I lived and breathed this music to the exclusion of all else for the best part of that ugly decade. For me, though, the nineties signalled 'too many CDs' as it appeared that any and every gig, session and 'summit' was recorded and pushed out to a perennially tiny audience. Where the market remains for so much product I still don't know - neither am I convinced that so many releases

are necessary in a field that has since its inception struggled with the status of the record (is it a document? An art object? What does improvised music become when it is available to repeated listening? And all that jazz...).

Erstwhile have squared that circle by presenting improvised music not as documentary snapshots but edited and presented as if through-composed - resulting in a series of releases that both surprise in the immediacy of their creativity and repay hours of further listening. These aesthetic priorities extend to the careful and often strikingly beautiful packaging - the sombre blue and black of VHF's moon/skinscape outer cover reveal an inner painting (that extends to the CD itself) redolent of a freshly-completed Herman Nitsch blood painting. VHF are a drums, sax and bass trio (respectively, Simon Vincent, Graham Halliwell and Simon H. Fell) who in seven 'extracts' (with an average of seven minutes per extract) redefine this stock trio line-up once and for all. Those expecting the post-Brötzmann roar of the remarkable Hessian/Wilkinson/Fell will be quite surprised by what Derek Bailey once referred to as the sound of 'overgrown undergrowth', a sound that is swampy and dense yet ringing and bright. Parts recall a similarly passionate-yet-pastoral set by Balance, a long-deleted Incus recording featuring Ian Brighton, Radu Malfatti, Phil Wachsmann and the towering Frank Perry. Like Balance, *Extracts* is immaculate. If you buy one improvised music CD this year make it this one. What is even more remarkable about VHF is that it was the first Erstwhile release - I guess it's been out for nearly two years. The label got it so right



from the off.

Later releases have magnificently repeated this success. Günter Müller and Lê Quan Ninh produce a restless electronic percussionscape that shimmers, serrates and soars. This is an especially successful duo recording, full of reversed sounds, bell-like cascades and impressive, sub-bass rumbles from Ninh's 'surrounded bass drum.' Last issue you couldn't shut me up about synth player Thomas Lehn; here he is again, this time coupling his analogue equipment with the digital bits and pieces of fellow German Marcus Schmickler, a Mille Plateaux recording artiste, amongst other achievements. Here they appear to construct and then factory-test a galactic shortwave radio that at that same time as it picks up microhouse and clickhop from our own solar system goes further out, sampling from the kinds of extraterrestrial sea shanties and herding rhymes I always hoped Sun Ra would point out to us, but never did. I can't think of anything better than having these two play at my birthday party.

CHRIS ATTON

www.erstwhilerecords.com

Kaffe Matthews

cd dd

UNITED KINGDOM ANNETTEWORKS
AWCD0004 CD (2000)

The latest (4th?) in a series of CDs by Kaffe, her electronic music processed live and in real time on the spot. The excellent results here are as full-bodied as you could wish for, even a little bit dangerous, and this CD could last the full five rounds with any heavyweight gorilla. Kaffe started off this series by processing her own violin playing, amplified and fed screaming into the mixing desk where she might work hot-wire butchery with her fingers of delicate ivory. And wearing purple nail polish, yet. Since that inception, there's been a gradual programme to push the violin outta the frame altogether, leaving nothing but live electronic processing. Well, that's a half-truth, because what she's processing now is the sound of the live arena in which she exposes herself – environments, atmospheres, presences, 'sonic snatches from the venue and around'. Taking sounds from the venue I can dig, but that 'around' worries me. Does she have

mics outside, stuck in the ornamental fountains of the luxury hotels where she appears? I prefer to think of it like this: a plucky young girl, out there alone in the sweaty pit of male-dominated modern music endeavour, where strapping muscular avant-gardists arm-wrestle each other over stacks of rare John Cage LPs. She feeds off their laddish behaviour, their sweat, adrenalin, and testosterone flying through the air, converts it into electronic signals, and blasts it out over the PA – thus turning their own macho energy against them. Sound as a weapon. Reconfiguring the very walls of the soundstage into a prison. Three long tracks of this sort of treatment, where the tension builds up relentlessly from small beginnings into a range of titanic roars, nervous textures, and abrasive static attacks.

ED PINSENT

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John Bisset and

Burkhard Beins

Chapel

UNITED KINGDOM 2:13 MUSIC
2:13CD012 CD (2001)

A brilliant full-bodied acoustic improv session from August 2000. John Bisset is a UK treasure who might be a bit under-recorded, but he's no stranger to the live arenas and improvising situations available on these shores. I like him best when he makes his guitar sound bad-tempered and slightly aggressive, spitting out a tremendous stuttering noise, dragging as much non-musical plucking and scratching racket as is possible from an acoustic instrument, and when he takes many liberties with the Derek Bailey-styled orthodoxies which have seeped into so much guitar improvising. He is perfectly complemented in his approach by the scraping and whacking approach of drummer / percussionist Beins, who must be a joy for any acoustic improviser to join in with. With his tickety-tackety non-rhythms, sketched in with a steely precision, he simply leaves you plenty of space, yet keeps on playing just enough to keep the piece propelled in the air for as long as need be.

They've been playing together since 1995 and touring Europe with their music; Beins is part of the 'New Berlin Reductionism' school. Recorded at the Stechinelli-Chapel in Beins' home town. The cover depicts a nice old photograph of this building, likewise the old Malthouse photo on a previous release in this 'Home Series' (by Rhodri Davies and Bisset). Visually I think this is a good strategy, as it doesn't really clue in the prospective listener as to what to expect; and in a field where indifferent sleeve art appears to be gaining ground, then it's all credit to the 2:13 design crew for these evocative sleeves.

ED PINSENT

Walter / Lonberg-Holm /

O'Rourke

Tribute to Masayuki

Takayanagi

GERMANY GROB 208 CD (2000)

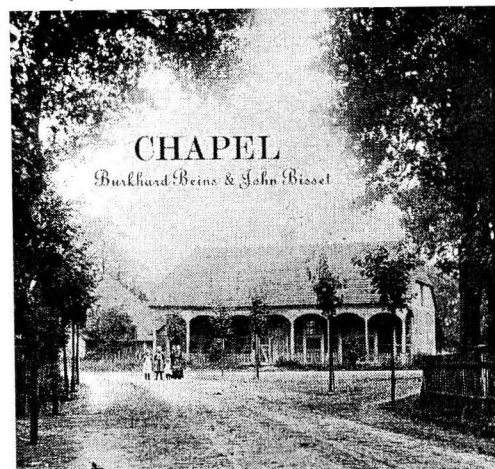
Billed as infernal improvised music – play loud and die, this CD is more silly and messy than infernal. I quite like two of the five tracks: 'Slitted Tit' which is an improvised guitar solo by Weasel Walter and 'Triumph of Death', again by Walter, which is the only track to approach something like infernal music. The rest of the time, Walter, cellist Fred Lonberg-Holm and Jim O'Rourke go for broke in a lightweight thrashy style inspired by a recording of a live performance in 1996 by Masayuki Takayanagi and his ensemble in which these musicians used guitar, cello and drums (the instruments also used on this tribute CD) to thrash out thunderous noise.

At least the titles on this CD are a laugh: 'For Jojo / Freebasing Styrofoam', 'Endless Corridors of Roasted Babies' (doesn't this one remind you all of a ditty by early 90s UK grindmetal band Carcass about mincing babies into pigswill?) and one that's sure to be a favourite for those who collect alarming song titles, 'Give Me Head 'Til You're Dead'. If you, like me, are in the habit of reading fine literature while listening to this racket coming out of your speakers, I recommend you read American writer John Shirley's short story 'Just Like Suzie', in which a prostitute is fatally felled by an overdose of crack through, erm, fellatio and if you think that's pretty bizarre, what her client does to get her off himself (because though deceased, she's still hanging onto him for dear ... well, I was gonna say life but her situation is rather beyond that) is a lot funnier.

Funniest of all though is the sleeve photos of Walter and Co trying to pass themselves off as well-fed members of some Norwegian black metal band – sorry fellas, but with names like Lycanthrovampyr and Sado-Immolator, you'll be laughed out of most churches before you can get the matches and the petrol cans out for the big bonfire. Try again!

JENNIFER HOR

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The Fall The Unutterable

UNITED KINGDOM EAGLE RECORDS EAGCD 164 CD (2000)

After a decade making interesting but inconsistent records, the Fall have finally rediscovered their form - *The Unutterable* makes it three corks in a row, the other two being *Levitane* and *The Marshall Suite*. If you're one of the many fans who gave them up for dead when *Extricate* hit the racks, get your house in order and buy this record now!

According to pre-publicity much of it was put together using the composition software Pro-Tools, a development which has had its purist detractors. But really no one should be surprised to discover that this approach suits Mark Smith and co down to the ground. The Fall may fit the superficial description of a guitar rock band but the way their records are arranged has more in common with dance music (and this has always been the case). Take 'Dr Buck's Letter' where the different elements that make up the track are abruptly dropped in or out like a dub mix. I'd guess this was facilitated by the software but in fact it's no departure for The Fall as this is the way they play anyway.

You don't have to watch too many rockumentaries to figure out that the vast majority of popular rock tunes start life on acoustic guitar, perhaps with a melody sung or hummed on top, and are later beefed up and adorned with other instruments. In many cases these surface elements can be removed without making much of a difference to the song - that's what makes it so easy for buskers to play, say, REM and Beatles songs. I've yet to come across anyone strumming 'Cruiser's Creek' or 'I Am Damo Suzuki' for spare change. One of the great appeals of Fall songs to me is their almost mathematical purity - every single element is important. Remove one part and the whole thing falls apart (as has been dramatically illustrated on a few occasions). The message of Smith's lyrics may often be obscure but one part of his philosophy shines through clearly in the music: every statement must count, don't take the middle of the road, make the most of your life.

The first half of the record illustrates this with a batch of tightly composed songs displaying the usual mercurial range of styles and showing that there's still plenty of scope to develop within the Fall's self-imposed limits. MES has a great knack for spotting the potential of the simplest musical ideas and making them count. I reckon there's few songwriters who could resist adding to and ruining a track as simple and thrilling as 'Cyber Insekt' - a rockabilly thumper in which the only aim of the arrangement is for all instruments to accentuate the driving drum beat.

The looser and more spontaneous side of The Fall gets a showing in the latter stages of the record, where the dynamics appear to have been added at the mixing stage according to spur-of-the-moment decisions, with strange and exciting results. When 'Devolute' seems to be fading to a close, it is only edging back in

order to reveal tender and hushed close-miked vocals. In the surprise grower of the record, 'Midwatch 1953', the music fills in the gaps in Smith's very minimal spoken recital, sketching in a story of a ghostly spirit manifesting itself via technology by mixing back and forth between two very different versions of the song: the first a ragged acoustic blues strum and the other a patchwork of bleeps and 50s BBC sci-fi synth draws.

And as always there's at least one track that completely throws your expectations of what MES will and won't allow his band to do - in this case it's 'Pumpkin Soup and Mashed Potatoes', a pastiche cocktail jazz tune with wild and funny embellishments using what sounds like an ocarina.

Full marks to producer Grant Showbiz for the great lush and dense sound throughout. Smith once stated, somewhat flippantly, that in the early days the Fall were so inept that he was forced to cover everything in distortion to make their efforts sound good. It seems he took a similar approach here with his 21st century apprentices, only this time it was synths, fx and programming that he used to paper over the cracks. Anyone who's seen one of their boisterous but mainly untelegenic live performances will find it hard to believe that guitarist Neville Wilding, bassist Adam Halal and drummer Tom Head were the musicians behind this very tight record. In fact it's tempting to think that Showbiz did a Trevor Horn and hired The Attractions to complete the record while the band were down the pub.

Whatever the case, it's clear that thought and imagination has gone into the recording of every element of the album. And you'll be glad to know that there's no sign of the slurring that's marred some of Smith's vocals in recent years; in fact he sounds in fine fettle and has developed a rather charming growl in his old age.

This being The Fall, the aforementioned musicians have already departed the band. Which may be no bad thing as, on the evidence of recent gigs, they've been superceded by a far more capable and professional bunch. Only keyboardist Julia Nagel remains, although her contribution to the band is somewhat controversial and elusive. She deserves much credit for her role as the band's chief arranger, but it's hard to reconcile with her ineffectual appearances on stage, where the ability to play in time or tune often seems to desert her. But hey - it wouldn't be The Fall if everything made sense. Can't wait to see what they do next!

HARLEY RICHARDSON

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CRASH AND CARRY * ROAD RAGE

Then the silence deepened. But, as we listened to the old canal muttering its feeble prayers and the creaking bones of sickly palaces above their damp green beards, under the windows we suddenly heard the famished roar of automobiles.

F.T. Marinetti The Founding and Manifesto of Futurism February 20, 1909

Well, we'd all be playing in the street, and a car would come down, and it'd have its headlights on, and if you were caught by the beam of the light, you'd be killed.

Disinformation Headlights, Antiphony 1997

On two separate occasions listeners called both the Brighton based Surf FM radio station and BBC Radio 4's *Today* programme to either complain or enthuse that broadcasts of Disinformation's *National Grid* had very nearly caused serious car accidents. This is as good an excuse as any to explain that boy-racer bible *Max Power* magazine was credited as an influence in the sleeve notes to Disinformation's *Al Jabr* CD for the simple reason that cruise culture is a true dead-ringer for the final practical realisation of the aesthetics, philosophy and sheer stupid enthusiasm of Italian Futurist sound art. The great Oxford-based scientist and Franciscan heretic **Roger Bacon** dreamed of carriages propelled without horses, and his caped ghost presided like an invisible genius-loci over the smoke filled satellite estates of the City of Screaming Tyres momentarily forming as an unseen Rorschach image in the clouds of burnt rubber, exhaust and cannabis smoke. Time was, Time is, Time shall be no more and for a few short weeks **Blackbird Leys** was the epicentre of British sound art far surpassing any attempts at recuperative plagiarism dreamt-up by the clueless Gauleiters of local state-sponsored gallery art. The fury and excitement of internal combustion, superamplified artificial heartbeats, the howl of brakes, leonine exhaust, fraying rubber and the frantic crackle of police-band radios transform the experience of contemporary motoring beyond a simple relationship with the immersive, anechoic calm of plush upholstery, as the human nervous system is electrified by the energy of barely-controlled machines.

Anyone naive enough to doubt the basic role of 95 in a 60, all-cylinders, 6 points and a 3 month ban sub-bass as a form of sexual display should consider the overlaps between Charles Darwin's *Origin of Species* (successive males display their gorgeous plumage and perform strange antics before the females), Valentine de Saint-Point's Futurist Manifesto of Lust and Renegade Soundwave's *Women Respond to Bass*. There is no question of abstract anthropological theorising burnouts are almost always literally sexual displays. *Max Power* and *Fast Car* magazines have almost as much to do with pornography as with body modifications and spare parts, and in English boy-racer culture headlights, breasts and sub-woofers are more-or-less interchangeable terms.

Disinformation 1997 2001

Next issue - Portrait of the Painter and his Pug - fresh from his recent stint curating *The Rumble at the Royal Society of British Sculptors*, Disinformation reports on engraver William Hogarth's peregrinations in his 1753 reg ICE'd-up metallic quartz blue Peugeot 306, and Goodrich tyres sponsor an exhibition devoted to the sinusoidal Line of Beauty and Grace... 'fun is not a straight line'... just like the advert says!

Ruby

Armpit

USA FREEDOM FROM (1998) C40

Thank you. Thank you so very much. No really, thank fucking you. Over the last few months I've enjoyed sporadic communications with the fine and intelligent persons of Rob Maycock at *Lockjaw* magazine, and Richo of *Adverse Effect* magazine. The thrust of my narrative has generally been directed in defence of cassettes. You see, neither organ will condescend to covering tapes, in fact Richo seems to regard the medium as the pursuit of shitehawks whose social standing falls somewhere between that of game show host and child molester. I've fought my corner with passion, fervently waving various flags sporting agit-prop slogans pointing out that while 80% of tapes may be rubbish, the same is true of vinyl or CD releases, and (my ace in the hole) that cassettes are the only truly democratic medium. Not everyone can afford to produce CDs, and economic circumstance should bear no relation on the quality of one's music. Then this turns up, and I'm forced to accept that which I probably knew all along on a subconscious level: That Rob and Richo are right and I'm talking largely out of my arse.

Ruby's *Armpit*, or Armpit's *Ruby*, or Ruby Armpit, or whatever the fuck it's called contains about twenty or so minutes of noises made in the general direction of a tape recorder. Fuzz, and non-fuzz guitar, vaguely audible drums, the odd bit of wailing, and so on - but doesn't it sound great and important if you call it 'free improvisation'? Okay, so some bits have a kind of admirably noisy quality, in a vaguely appologetic way, and I've no doubt those concerned were into it at the time. But even so, I just can't see why this should exist. The tape looks like a duplication centre job, so presumably someone's gone to the trouble of small-scale mass production. The barely legible cover is a laminated colour copy. Some sense of pride must have kicked in somewhere along the line even if only as an afterthought. I hate to slag off someone's doubtlessly fine intentioned efforts, but while there's still a thousand million of these folks out there who just can't keep this sort of pointless rambling twattery to themselves, it's making those few of us who do make the effort, sweating blood and tears to produce that one cassette that someone might want to listen to more than once, look like cunts. To those thousands of millions I say get proper jobs, pack it in, keep it in your bedroom, whatever - just stop bringing the bloody average down and spare the rest of us from this needless suffering.

WAR ARROW

KD

KD

USA FREEDOM FROM (2001?) C60

Initials, address, and two titles ('Bara En Samling Ljud' and 'Ännu En Samling Ljud') are all I have to go on, but from the description in the catalogue, I'm assuming this could be the work of Kevin Drumm, this possibly being what is described as his '5th solo album'. Yeah, well, if you'd penned all those megahits for Whitney, Mariah, and Janet, probably you too would want to kick out a solo set every once in a while. Facetious remarks aside, this isn't entirely without worth. Two sides of electronic burps, mains hum, or maybe guitar pick-up noise, chopped up and digitised into some sort of composition. Whatever KD has done, he seems to have done with no little quotient of technical expertise. The problem I have is that, like abstract painting, I suspect value judgements attached to this sort of thing are largely in the ear of the beholder. Rothko's the man; Matta rocks the fuckin' universe; De Kooning sucks ass - I couldn't even begin to tell you why I should hold such opinions for with such an abnormally daunting volume of rules piling up in the skip outside the window, the whole thing is inevitably reduced to a question of personal taste. Does it succeed on its own unique terms? Who knows, when you can't even tell what these terms or parameters may be? At worst this just ends up sounding so randomised as to be a technologically superior reminder of the days when folks used to slap out C60s of pure short-wave radio noise, inevitably named in tribute to some bad guy and with a nasty picture on the cover. On the other hand, certain passages of 'Ännu En Samling Ljud' sound tantalisingly close to vaguely composed pieces. For my money, this spends a little too much time emphasising its own essentially disordered nature, thus shooting itself in the foot, or at least me in my attention span, and by the time it starts flirting with "interestingness" the listener is probably flicking through the TV guide or making a cup of tea. So, in summary, I can't actually say this is bad, and if you're big on Farmer's Manual and the like, you should certainly consider checking this out.

WAR ARROW

Skipload

~~~~~ of

## ▶▶ Tapes

Commendable DIY ethics

**Christina Carter**

**L'Etoile de Mer**

USA FREEDOM FROM (2001) C60

Side one contains a pair of similar recordings offered to an audience as (I presume) improvised and live accompaniment to Man Ray's short film *L'Etoile de Mer*. It's played on a single amplified guitar, notes picked and plucked in such a clean and uncluttered way that even I could have done it... oh, and with extremely sparing use of tremolo arm and tone controls. It's a while since I've seen those flickery old Man Ray experiments, but I can imagine this must have worked well. Lacking the visual component, this fails to perform any dramatic musical somersaults, but still succeeds on its own softly spoken terms. One might suspect, as I did, that such modest minimalism could make for an experience akin to watching paint dry, or listening to a hardcore Doctor Who fan explain why *The Tenth Planet* (1966, directed by Derek Martinus) is essentially a Kafka-esque dénouement of Jungian archetypes - but not so! This soundtrack's strength is probably its simplicity, its lack of extraneous clutter. It just gets on with the job, rather than trying to out-weird anyone with expressionist improv worthiness. Side two, which doesn't appear to be a soundtrack for anything in particular, makes use of the same virtues. Consisting of a solo female voice wandering in non-verbal fashion between notes and tones, again, it doesn't really go anywhere in particular, but then neither does it make any promises it can't keep. I doubt I'm likely to ever punch someone's face in for my right to listen to this, but it is in fact a reasonably pleasant and momentarily engaging listening experience.

WAR ARROW

**Stewart Walden**

**Annoying**

USA FREEDOM FROM (NOT SURE BUT SOME OF IT DATES FROM 1992) C90

*Annoying*, eh? Ha ha ha ha. Oh dear me. *Annoying*. Tee hee - bless



my soul. Ho ho ho... if I might just be permitted a minute or two to regain my composure.

Mr. Walden's SWANC tape, produced in collaboration with Neil Campbell and reviewed here last issue, primed me for a further hour or so of nutty and noisy merriment. While this isn't all bad, *Annoying* does seem to be a particularly fitting title. Needless to say, few of the tracks have been produced by Jim Steinman with the kind co-operation of the Berlin Symphony Orchestra, but it isn't the humble quality which is a problem. The more successfully stupid, and hence listenable numbers seem to have coagulated into a big lump on side two. You know the sort of thing, songs called 'Big Double Chin', tinny Casio keyboards, biscuit tin drums and so on. Commendable and healthy stuff. The problem, for me, lies in all the other bits and pieces that turn up like fat kids and brainos to fill out the numbers on sports day. As an ex-fat kid braino myself, I probably should be more tolerant, but then some of this really does try the patience. For starters, we open with a lengthy poetry reading from some live event. 'Jabberwocky' is recited in French. Titters and guffaws from the audience. Someone plays the piano with their arse. Mirth ensues. You probably had to be there. I wasn't, so it all sounds a bit unnecessary to me. Some of it's good. Some of it is annoying. While the whole affair isn't entirely lacking in worth I can't see this cassette's limited appeal enduring with such timeless grace as, for example, the epic adventures of the Mesopotamian culture hero Gilgamesh. Harsh words but they need to be said.

WAR ARROW

### Diz Willis Presents...

#### Cosmic Skanking Realignment Of The Meduza

USA FREEDOM FROM (WHO KNOWS WHEN?) C60 BUT IT FELT LIKE A C1,000,000

Somewhere there is a photograph of Sexton Ming, fag hanging from mouth, sombrero on head, playing a piano with mallets whilst to one side Billy Childish looks on, convulsed by hysterical laughter. Can't remember where. This tape opens up with promises of flying the flag for this same unbreakable spirit - a tape recorder picking up funny noises, distorted background music and members of (it says here) The Shite Girls, Smell & Quim, and Phase Space shitting themselves with 100% uncut mirth. Then it carries on for another sixty minutes. Do I really need to continue? Is it music? Is it art? Is it noise-folk having a few jars and a few laughs? If you want to listen to it as music then you could be pushing the boundaries far beyond any thus far conceived by John Cage or Steve Stapleton. The annoying thing is, aside from the fact that I am now owed an hour of my life, this sort of bollocks doesn't by definition have to be so uninviting. I still have a tape from 1983 by Cause For Concern, which basically consists of Larry Peterson and some ladyfriends getting off their boxes and giggling like imbeciles to a soundtrack of Throbbing Gristle and Michael Jackson. Dare I say, it's actually pretty good stuff. Larry Peterson's ability to talk rubbish was a powerful asset which he obviously neglected to capitalise upon in the years that followed, if his current apparent anonymity is any measure. The bit where he puts on a comedy voice and taunts the girls, William Bennett style, with "no cheese and crisps for yoo-hoo! No cheese and crisps for yoo-hoo!" has me on the edge



of my seat every time. This, however, would probably be great or better if you could make out a bit more than the odd snippet of what's being said. But you can't so it isn't. I'll bet they had a reet good laff doing this, but I truly pity the poor fucker who buys it. This is why so many people hate tapes.

WAR ARROW

### Julian Bradley

#### Stella Concrete Geet

USA FREEDOM FROM (1999) C60

Hmmm. We had this geezer up on the metaphorical blocks for inspection a few issues back, didn't we? Collaborative effort with Neil Campbell as I remember. Nice bit of work. Has he done it again, we wonder.

It starts off, and closes, in excellent form with similar lengthy pieces of hard and heavily textured volume. Slabs of noise can sometimes be much of a muchness, but Bradley, using subtly ululating loops of noise and feedback, has crafted something which actually keeps you listening in spite of its relentless quality. There's a lot in there, it would seem. I listened to this on a Walkman at work and its impressive enough to

negate quibbles about the relatively humble sound quality. Nothing much seems to change but, as with, I dunno, a good Pollock or something, your attention continually wanders to focus on different parts of the noise. I probably could have listened to a full hour of this stuff. Unfortunately the noisy bits act as bookends to a couple of less successful pieces. Well, they didn't do a lot for me anyhow. 'Slow Blown Song' just sounds like someone scrubbing out a metal bucket with a wire brush for twenty or so minutes, in a cattle shed. Still, at least this is one tape that has some redeeming qualities, and ones you don't have to rummage around for.

WAR ARROW

All of the above are available from: Freedom From, Box 582391, Minneapolis, MN 55458-2391, USA

### Howl In The Typewriter

#### Memories Of Nothing

UNITED KINGDOM PUMF RECORDS PUMF259 C20 WITH BOOKLETS

Impressive. Included here are a couple of booklets. The first is a modest dissertation about the music of Howl In The Typewriter, which to be honest, it being largely the subjective opinion of a third party, I didn't find wildly illuminating. The second, slightly more ambitious tome is an exhaustive history of Stan Batcow's numerous works. Being autobiographical, and including reprints of various fanzine interviews, one might suspect Typewriter-dude of a certain maniacal egotism. If this is so, it certainly doesn't come across in the text, and such quibbles are soon forgotten once you get reading. The picture which emerges of Howl's twenty year involvement in the world of weird tapes and music, of which even the author doesn't seem to have noticed, is of a unique and undiscovered genius. I'd say one of the last great eccentrics, if it didn't sound so patronising. Accounts of Howl's sporadic and bizarre live events demonstrate this vividly. One featured taped music whilst Santa distributed presents (squeaky toys) amongst the audience. One witness insists it was the real Santa; he saw Stan shortly after the event and realised he wouldn't have had time to shave off that huge white beard. During another event, each audience member was given their own brussel

sprout. Only one person declined, fleeing from the venue, thus having to be chased in order to become the lucky recipient of the aforementioned vegetable. A lot of this stuff suggests Coum Transmissions without the pierced knobs, bad-guy fixation or art school element. Much of this probably explains why Stan has remained in such relative obscurity. He does whatever he feels is most appropriate (or even inappropriate) at the time, whether this be poetry, stories, heartbreaking pop music, walls of howling noise, or brussel sprout donation. Howl In The Typewriter defies easy categorisation and saps like us usually regard such eclecticism as a sign of inconsistency. Let's face it, even the most out-there taboo smashers tend to stick to a formula. Derek Bailey doesn't do cockney knees-up. LaBradford have yet to crunk that ass up on some New Orleans bounce. Oval's Tijuana brass album is conspicuous by its non-existence. This doesn't seem to bother Stan. He just does what he wants, when he wants to do it, and so annoyingly well that maxims about being a jack of all trades don't come into it.

As if to illustrate the above, the cassette contains a ten minute excerpt from a live mix of loops and sound sources that lasted eleven and a quarter hours. The whole thing exists spread over the 77 tapes that make up this limited edition package. Therefore each copy is a unique recording. Mine is a wailing assemblage of bits and pieces, strangely reminiscent of very very early Devo, which just makes me wish I'd been at some of those Howl gigs. This is a pretty humbling experience. Read this fascinating booklet, enjoy the music, and someone for fuck's sake give this man buckets of money and make him famous. It's all very well you sitting there stroking your beard at the Beefheart retrospective in *Mojo*, whining about how modern music is boring. Either you ain't looking in the right places, or you have all the personality of an issue of *Reader's Digest*.

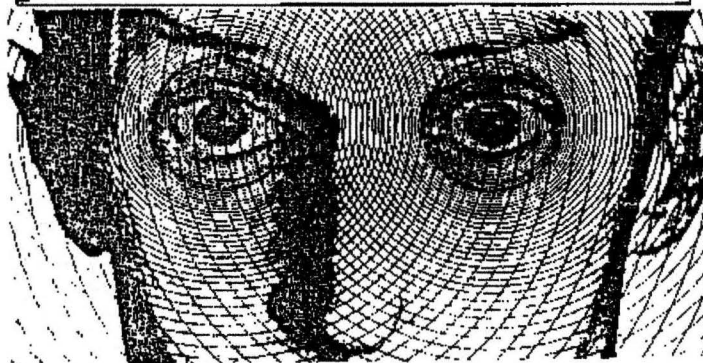
WAR ARROW

## Howl In The Typewriter Dog-Turd In Shrewsbury

UNITED KINGDOM PUMF RECORDS PUMF161 C90 AND C60 WITH BOOKLETS, POSTERS, BADGES ETC

Stan is kind of hard to pin down musically, but I'm beginning to see a sort of pattern. I've always been a fan of the one man band. There seems to be a certain type of individual whose creative excellence goes stratospheric when unhindered by other folks, spare-wheel bass players getting in the way trying to add a bit of an Oasis feel to the mix. I'm talking about those authors of a song so big that it just nails

'Leave me alone, police shit, I want to enjoy myself, life is boring, we want the goods, the money, power...



*Howl in the  
Type writer*



you down within the space of an opening bar, filling your field of vision and eclipsing anything else for the space of a few minutes. Eno (first two or three albums), The The, Nine Inch Nails, Foetus, Severed Heads - forget the odd lapses - just think of 'Third Uncle', 'Perfect Day', 'Head Like A Hole' or 'Greater Reward'. Pure joyous pop doesn't have to be musically conservative or monotonous, or thick-as-shite! Howl In The Typewriter, as I now realise, definitely ranks as highly as any of those mentioned above. Don't be put off by the curiously uninviting title, this is an astonishingly fine use of two and a half hours of anybody's time. As I've grown to expect, it's all over the place. There's a whole half hour of harrowingly noisy live material, complete with unenthusiastic commentary from audience members in the background; tape collage experiments; 'In The Nude' which pre-empt both Jive

Bunny and Fat Boy Slim; a collaboration with Yxmalloo; two bizarrely chosen Beatles covers; and songs the calibre of, for example, 'Melt' and 'Share' which are, just... I dunno... fuck... I can't explain... sheer genius. Listening closely one notices that whilst Stan's recording set up isn't lowest common denominator, neither is it hugely extravagant, so it is a testament to his skill that he achieves such synapse-tickling results. Many of the songs make use of Roland's 606 and 303 (drum machine and bass computer) and rarely have I heard the same clobber being used so extensively without any hint of repetition or overall same-iness creeping in. I could carry on like this for ages, but such a catalogue of effervescent praise would probably get embarrassing after a while, so please just take my word for it. It's all good. Just buy the fucking (excuse my French) tape, okay! C'mon! What are you waiting for? Do yourself a good thing! Buy it now!

WAR ARROW

Pumf Records, 25, Ivy Avenue, Blackpool, FY4 3QF, UK

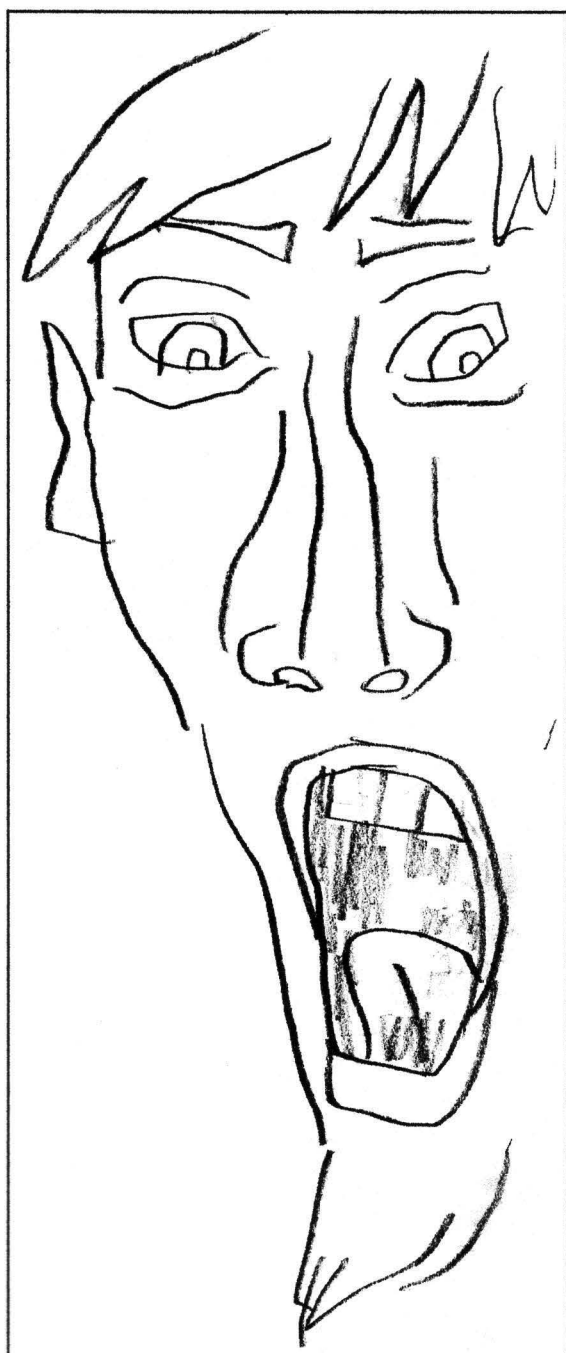
## SKIPLOAD OF TAPES Lucky Draw Thing!

This time around, the Gods of fate have smiled down upon Jash of Chorley in Lancashire, whose lucky postcard was picked at random out of the Skipload lucky draw tombola. Thustly, Jash gets a big box, the postage cost of which means I won't be eating for a week, of ex-review material that we've finished with, didn't want, couldn't write about, or didn't have room for - tapes, CDs, fanzines, vinyl etcetera. Sure, some of it ain't that great, but some of it should be. That's the mystery and wonder of the Skipload Of Tapes Lucky Draw Jackpot Bonanza. And just think, it could've been you, but you have to be in it to win it, so if you weren't... well, there's your answer. It's so simple, even a dog could do it. Just send us a postcard marked 'Skipload Of Tapes Lucky Draw Thing' adorned with your name and address, keep your fingers crossed for the best part of a year, purchase every sprig of lucky heather you can get your hands on, avoid walking under ladders or putting your shoes on the table and one day it could be you sitting amid a pile of tapes and CDs and shit freshly disgorged from this organ, gathering them in your hands and flinging them up to shower down upon you whilst laughing like a drain. Think about it.

THE - THE - ENT - THE  
**DISC-URATOR'S**

**D ■ E ■ N**

COMPILATIONS ARE OUR SWORDFISH  
STEAKS **various artists weave on antique loom**



Fenetik leads the way with 'Rubber Duck', consisting of treated vocals, and Sandy Grey Russet which was an ordeal to hear at first, sounding much like Godzilla's stomach when digesting victims, but which gets a little easier on the ear with repeated hearings. Kill and Human Host present relatively familiar-sounding garage punk while NeTE's style sits comfortably in the camp of UK guitar-industrial act Godflesh and would probably be as famous as that band and its clones if they were to go, er, overseas. Parasiticus Dei offers up 'Sacrificial Earth' which sounds like Godzilla suffering a bout of diarrhoea but I hasten to add it's still a very worthy piece.

Like Fenetik and Human Host, Undecisive God offers 2 tracks, the far-too-short at 90 seconds 'Azathoth 2', and the atmospheric 'Pray', both rendered on guitar. After these tracks, the disc delves into more experimental territory: Isomer's '(Song for) Aquatic Dreamers' includes Fruity Loops sounds and effects, and Anna's 'The Air Witch' is a spooky experience produced by 2 people blowing air thru a mic with feedback into an effects pedal and amplifier. Anna also presents 'Lament' which is well-named - you'll lament over the presence of this limp piano piece on the CD.

The final track 'Drone...' by Kettle is an 18-minute opus of computer-generated drone recorded for a live performance at a Brisbane hotel gig as part of UK sound artist Simon Wickham-Smith's Australian tour in early 2000. As the track is a base ingredient for live performance, you would not expect it to vary that much but it is very mesmerising and sinister with its relentless throbbing. This is easily the

**Various Artists**  
**Behind Closed Doors:**  
**Australia**  
**Home-Recorded**  
**Experiments**  
AUSTRALIA SHAME FILE  
MAILORDER CD-R SHAM013  
(2000)

Nine acts perform the 13 tracks on this compilation of home-recorded Australian experimental music ranging from vocals/guitars/drums set-ups to blowing air to computer-generated drones. Considering that all the acts here recorded the music in their own or their parents' homes on often very basic equipment, I am amazed at the quality of the recordings with only 1 track that I would consider a real bummer.

standout track, though Anna's 'The Air Witch' and the Undecisive God pieces are not far behind; indeed, apart from Anna's 'Lament' there is not a bad track to be found. I did find some of the earlier guitar-oriented tracks a bit uninteresting but that's probably because I outgrew garage and Godflesh years ago.

This CD is one for all obsessive music collectors and hopefully will also inspire some of you to engage in your own lounge room and bedroom experiments - of a musical kind, that is. Well, if the CD inspires you to engage in non-musical lounge and bedroom experiments, that's OK too ...

JENNIFER HOR

*SHAME FILE Mailorder, 15 Neil St, West Footscray, Victoria, 3012, Australia (limited copies)*

**Various Artists**  
**Mottomo Otomo -**  
**Unlimited XIII**  
AUSTRIA TROST TRO76 CD  
(2001)

Hardly a single duff track on this massively superb compilation, collected from the November 1999 Music Unlimited Festival at Wels, Austria, curated by none other than the great Otomo Yoshihide. If this souvenir is anything to go by, he fulfilled this commission brilliantly. There are four main threads of evidence for this assertion:

(a) great music was performed live on stage.

(b) Otomo curated the shows with enthusiasm and allowed *personal* choices of his favourite music (and musicians) to be his guide. (ie he didn't kow-tow to some pre-ordained scheme of



mutual backslapping and promotional wheeler-dealing).

(c) he still managed to incorporate a sense of responsibility and respect for the history of 20<sup>th</sup> century music, and more importantly for the *future* of experimental music.

(d) he empowers the listener. 'The presence of the listeners creates the music freely', he observes with precision in his notes. 'It...questions the principles of performing and creating music in itself'.

Otomo's twin loves at an early age were for free jazz and the 'strange sounds' of electronic music. Here he exhibits his love for those reference points, and a wide range of experimentalism in between and beyond, in his choices of musicians. Radian are a Mego label band who sorta do electronics with a jazzy feel; they use live percussion and bass with added electronic fweeps and fwurrs. This cut is more minimal than studio work I've heard and even exhibits an awareness of dub mixing. Incapacitants are Japanese past masters of energised full-on noise, boasting not a few 'unlistenable' records in their discog. They may have reined in their energy somewhat, but it's still white-hot. Annette Krebbs is joined by Andrea Neumann and Kaffe Matthews, the latter being the UK violinist and live sound-processor whose solo CDs are so intensely fine. Here they settle for smaller sounds, door-buzzers and stuff.

Martian Tétrault and Dianne Labrosse mix strange samples with a good deal of rattling and humming activity. Nagata Kazunao plays an old fashioned 1970s ARP synth, analogue equipment that makes young Londoners grovel in Denmark Street. Nagata is great. In fact he sounds more like 1950s electronic music. Novo Tono are a modern progressive band I guess, with songs and solos yet, but they play in the Magma vein rather than Barclay James Harvest. Good stuff, but overlong at 8 minutes. Poire\_Z is an unfortunate name, but conceals the genius of Voice Crack joined by the excellent French turntabler Erik M, and European all-rounder Günter Müller (who's played with Otomo as part of the great Metal Tastes Like Orange).

Hoahio are of course the divine Haco here playing with Otomo's girlfriend Sachiko M, and the koto player Yagi Michiyo - all of whom were also spotted at the

Japan Underground tours of the UK in 2001. See elsewhere this ish for Haco's essential new solo CD. She is as good as Kate Bush and Joni Mitchell combined, and she does it with electronics. What are you waiting for?

As for Otomo's contributions, he frames the CD with two solo turns and in between adds to a transcendental five minute jam with guitarists Taku Sugimoto and Keith Rowe; and allows us to hear his tribute to modern jazz, the Otomo Yoshihide New Jazz Quintet. This venture is one that's worth investigating - the piece here starts off kinda corny and smoochy, with loads of major-seventh chords, but develops into a slow and deeply moving work that completely transcends any notion of pastiche.

What a comp. And there may

people like Otomo are allowed to do it, then everyone comes out a winner. Immediate purchase for this recommended.

ED PINSENT

office@trost.at

## Various Artists Bip-Hop Generation V.1

FRANCE BIP-HOP BLEEP  
01 CD (2000)

Two volumes of this French compilation so far, a third on its way - planned target of four releases a year. They are very respectable and brilliantly packaged surveys of modern electronic music, a true international mix of established and younger players, and a similar approach perhaps as the

gives out with the nice beats, the nice sounds, but that's the sum total of his skills; lacking the musical craft to develop a strong melody or even a tonal centre, his top-lines simply meander into nowhere fast. I think, given how easy it is to programme keyboards and sequencers, that this is a basic pitfall facing the electronic composer, and one which should be negotiated where possible.

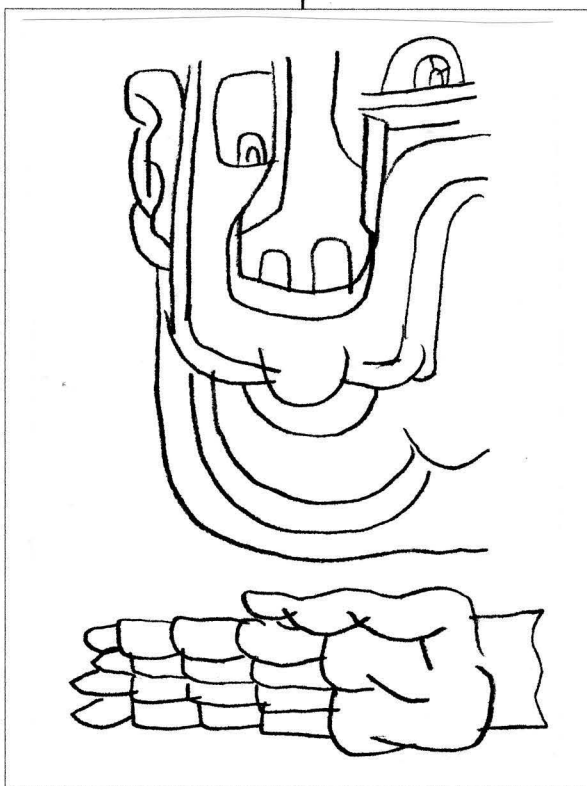
Schneider TM has several releases on City Slang. He recorded his cut in Berlin and did it all live in one take. No pretense at pop music here, just abstract noises set to beats - processed, stolen or looped 'voices', and a crackly electronic tone occasionally varied with a little hand-manipulation. Somehow, it's all a bit aimless, but at least it's somewhat grittier than the above.

Massimo is an austere, Sicilian, minimalist mo-fo who believes strongly in the well-known adage 'a glitch in the hand is better than a loaded Beretta'. He's merciless. Using only one or two extremely pared-down sonic elements, often of a painful excruciating nature, he cunningly builds gigantic castles in the air. Ay, he's certainly of the Ryoji Ikeda school - in fact, he even samples Ryoji on one of these two tracks! Perhaps superfluous to remark that Massimo has releases on Staalplaat and the MEGO MP3 label, Falsch.

Goem are three important Dutch guys, including the notable Frans de Waard, whose music does zero for me. Cruelly, I've put the boot in before and it seems impolite to do so again.

Ultra Milkmaids are French, and turn in a rather fine track called 'Mystic 2K'. Of all the batch on this comp, they are the only ones to have...gulp...*...touched* me, with their brand of electronic nostalgia. They ain't afraid to be a little bit tender, where the rest of this cybernautic record is muscular, masculine, airless, almost barren. The Milkmaids do it with out-of-synch loops and stab-samples, and constantly repeat a lovely chord in shattered fragments.

Phonem is from the UK, but lives in Leipzig. Clearly owing the biggest debt to 'dark' drum'n'bass, driving his tracks with an extremely nasty spitting rhythm, but he sweetens the deal with some jolly piano chords on the top. And, with a subversive quip to end the comp, he samples a voice telling us that 'governments are not the



be more releases to come, perhaps from the Charhizma and Trost labels, including some quieter performances from the Onkyo Music Room and the chamber musical piece 'Mira Ni Naru Made', which was apparently one of the highlights of the fest. Kind of makes you sick you weren't there, doesn't it? You see, folks, how international music fests can be a lot more than just chummy get-togethers for the musicians, or opportunities for slick marketing and promotional deals. They can be - gaspo - about the music. And when

Insine or Fallt labels. Philippe Petit is the compiler. The digipacks display a strong design sense, and the very clearly laid-out booklets provide good descriptions, bios, discographies and contact addresses for all artists. It's funny though, how so many of them (if not all) are of the male persuasion, and solo acts. And they all have websites.

Marumari is an American pop-electronicist, which means I suppose that although he isn't in the charts, his music aspires to be melodious, colourful, altruism. His 'surface' is very bright; he

solution to our problems – they are the problem.'

ED PINSENT

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### Various Artists Bip-Hop Generation V.2

FRANCE BIP-HOP BLEEP  
02 CD (2001)

...follows the same pattern as above with another clutch of similar-minded artists. Names here include Bernhard Fleischmann, Arovane, Warmdesk, Kohn, Wang Inc, and Laurent Pernice. It's all acceptable enough digital noise, but I will single out for mention here Warmdesk (a guy from America who moved to Vienna) and his four tracks of heavy distortion, cruel sounds and illogical beats; Kohn, because his stuff is so delightfully silly and inconsequential; and the lyrical charms of Laurent Pernice, a French guy whose 'Soft and Round' music resembles modern composition more than techno-derived computer malarkey.

ED PINSENT

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### Various Artists Extreme Music from Women

UNITED KINGDOM SUSAN  
LAWLY CD SLCD023 (2000)

Third in Susan Lawly's Extreme Music series, EMFW presents 16 mostly solo acts who more or less spit out the kind of harsh and often screechy noise electronix we expect from SL label founder William Bennett and his band Whitehouse. Half the artists featured hail from the US with the rest from Australia, the UK, Italy and Austria, a small range of countries to be associated with noise (Japan a noticeable absentee from the list).

Like many compilations, EMFW has its good moments and bad. Among the good moments I count Annabel Lee's slobbering 'Lycanthropy' which the artist hilariously dedicates to her brothers; this gal sure runs with the wolves! I also include Karen Thomas's 'Puritan'; if you'll excuse the rather pedestrian

vocals, this track may well have you thinking of an old and decaying nuclear reactor falling in on itself and discharging radioactive wastes into the soils, the rivers ... Other attractions include Wendy Van Dusen's sinister little 'Dog', Diane Nelson's 'Mounted Insect and Dissected Insect' and Gaya Donadio's head-cleaning, Japanese noise-style 'Indiscretion'. I'm also a bit partial to Debra Petrovich's 'Dislocated', whose brooding Gothic ambience suggests secret violence; there's a dry, scholarly air about the track though (Petrovich is an university academic) and it's likely to seem too long and pretentious to some ears. I'm also partial to Lisa and Naomi Tocaty's screamingly funny and hysterical 'Stiletto Nights'; in the EMFW

sandwiched between Thomas and Donadio doesn't help). The Cannery track and Rosemary Malign's 'No You Listen' were both produced by William Bennett and these sound similar to Whitehouse's music, basically rhythm and noise textures overlaid with haranguing vocals. Many of the tracks (including some mentioned before) don't go beyond static rhythm and noise collages which isn't necessarily a bad thing if the tracks are short (most of them are) but if you (like me) prefer more dynamic and fluid, even sculptural and architectonic, noise, you may be a bit disappointed.

The most contentious aspect of the EMFW compilation is the booklet photos depicting a naked young woman with what appear to be self-inflicted



booklet accompanying the disc, there are photos of all the artists involved and the Tocaty's photo has a bespectacled lass resembling Nana Mouskouri who I assume is the one who does all the stuck pig squealing. Am I right? Did I just hear one of my TSP colleagues declare his everlasting and undying partiality for Nana Mouskouri?

Among the not-so-good moments I include Cat Hope's 'Mindimi Trek' which stumbles around for 8 or 9 minutes and Betty Cannery's thin and underpowered tedium 'Closeted' (I suppose being

wounds. Mr Bennett courts controversy again with printing these pix out of their original context with no captions explaining why they're in the set, leaving the EMFW project open to charges of exploitation and misogyny. Well, since most of SL's other releases of men playing music features photos of women in various stages of injury and undress, I think the EMFW disc should've had pix of MEN in various stages of injury and undress. I'm sure many of the EMFW artists will second my opinion - I've a feeling the Tocaty girls would definitely

agree but don't ask how I know - put it down to female intuition! Perhaps one day when SL releases something like *Extreme Music from Animals* or *Extreme Music from Plants*, we'll see some interesting artwork... Who spoke of the hare turning on its hunters?

JENNIFER HOR

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Edinburgh, EH17 8BF, UK  
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www.susanlawly.freeuk.com

### Various Artists Thirteen

AUSTRIA KLANG GALERIE  
GG6 CD (1999)

I suspect it is simply a symptom of the ageing process that where compilation albums were once exciting and unique events, as one gets older and more decrepit, each new collection seems less memorable than the last. I still recall vividly where and when I first heard compilation tracks by I'm Dead, Treckellion Skyways, and White Elephants Over Jamaica, but now - it all just seems to be one drab blur of M. Nomized, Illusion Of Safety and others too anonymous to name. Anyway, in light of the above, *Thirteen* makes a fairly respectable showing for itself. Mildly technified tracks dominate but there's enough variety to make the whole a fairly well-balanced musical diet. Aube's 'Tang' does much to explain why he seems to be so popular in these parts. Chris Carter's solo offering (I guess Cosy was about her womanly chores or making him some chips for tea or something) proves that he can still piss on most of the electro-competition when he chooses to do so. I've still got much love for Chris & Cosy and I wish they'd hit me up with this good shit that I know they're capable of a bit more often. Asmus Tietchens provides a wonderful atmospheric soundtrack of wood blocks and xylophones (I'm guessing) which just cries out to be ruined by some theatre group specialising in interpretative dance. Binary plays the spoons again, in a not unimpressive drum 'n' bass stylee. Konstruktivists go through a lengthy krautrock workout in homage to La Düsseldorf (it's called 'Dinger's Dog') which is about ten times better than anything I've heard by the Dinger lads in a long while, sadly. Finally, ignoring stuff by - sigh - Illusion Of Safety and the like, Werner Mobius

cuts us off some proper piano-driven dance music that would've merged effortlessly into that whole thing when acid turned into deep house and Detroit techno or vice versa, and by proper I mean not that stuff by black-clothes wearing white folks with Cassandra Complex LPs who get into it because 'dance music is easy'.

Refreshingly good stuff, providing you skip a couple of less-interesting tracks. A compilation to hang onto and enjoy, so don't be trying to buy this down the Record and Tape Exchange, because I don't think you'll find any copies that way.

**WAR ARROW**

*Klang Galerie, PO Box 41,  
A-1124 Wien, Austria.*

## Various Artists

### Hiss

UNITED KINGDOM ASH  
INTERNATIONAL ASH 5.2  
CD (2000)

If I knew how the tracks on this compilation relate to the discourse on 'hiss' in the accompanying booklet, I might appreciate *Hiss* more. The pieces of music, spoken word and sound recordings derive from the more obscure releases in the Ash catalogue, so the connection could be metaphorical: if we all take the time to listen to unassuming backing noises like hisses as we go about our daily activities (and especially between activities when we pause for a breather), we may discover their complexity and the secrets they reveal, and be tempted to explore them and their sources.

Evan Parker's 'London Overthrow' comes off the *Al-Jabr* CD, which consists of different musicians' interpretations and remixes of Disinformation tracks from his *R&D* and *R&D2* CDs. The Evan Parker track happens to be the highlight on *Al-Jabr* anyway, so you need not necessarily investigate that CD. Better still, why not go to the original sources of those Disinformation recordings? (Makes me wonder why Disinformation is not featured on *Hiss*.)

The *Ghost Orchid* CD is represented by a recording of Raymond Cass talking about alien voices. If you want to hear that CD, you're best advised to borrow your local library's copy as the novelty value of dead people communicating via radio and other electronic means wears off very quickly, and the

CD sounds just like any other spoken word radio recording. Another Ash release whose novelty also wears off quickly is the *Santa Pod* drag racing CD: your ears will bleed with irritation at the constant twitterings of drag racing commentators and your brains will hope beyond hope that an American drag racing CD reviewed in *The Wire* some time ago will be reprinted for purchase. Alas, I forget what that CD is called!

I wasn't greatly enamoured of SETI's *Above Black*; the concept behind it is more interesting than the CD itself. The sister CD to *Above Black* is represented by a track which is one of the better tracks on *Hiss* but after seeing some reviews of *Pod*, I'm not really game to try listening to these CDs! Of the

time of writing, I confess I've only heard *Life...* twice so the possibility exists that I may get bored with hearing a life support machine's inner workings. There's a 10-minute number as well which would melt the socks off most noise artists.

As compilations go, *Hiss* doesn't impress me much. If the concept is what I think it is, the production behind some of the tracks does not help their cause. Indeed, I find myself almost in a hissy fit - now that's one thing not mentioned in the booklet; hissing adder, hisser, hissing, hissing ...

**JENNIFER HOR**

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other Ash CDs represented here, I know nothing so I will just say here that of the tracks that represent them, Bernd Friedmann's *Leisure Zones* is the best.

So we come to the non-Ash CD which is Firework Edition's *Life Everlasting, Amen* CD by Jeff Sedgley and MSC Harding. The particular extract sounds weak (I notice a number of tracks on *Hiss* sound debilitated compared to the originals on the source CDs and wonder if that's deliberate or accidental) and not likely to attract punters to the source CD which is a shame as the 67-minute track from which the extract comes is enthralling in its own highly repetitive and relentless way. The start of the track is so sudden it's enough give you a cardiac arrest. At this

## Various Artists Cast Exotic Vol. 1 - Music For The Psych-Eye! CANADA CAST EXOTIC ARCHIVES X001 CD (2000)

The recent completion of the human genome project has revealed, as I suspected it would, the existence of a gene for punk rock. Indeed, as I explained to the judge, it is this particular twist in the weave of my deoxyribonucleotides that compels me to burn down new-age book shops, commit arson on the beards of Timothy Leary enthusiasts, stalk that lanky uncoordinated dick out of Primal Scream, and generally shun most things sixties in the

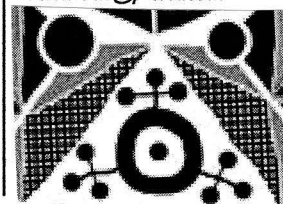
'far out' sense. So the 'far out' title in 'far out' type, coupled with the phrase 'modern psychedelia' in the press release of this compilation, came close to bringing on another one of my funny turns. Luckily, before the full onset of a red mist, closer inspection revealed that although some of this stuff gets a bit carried away, I wouldn't insult it with a term like 'modern psychedelia'.

*Music For The* I can't even bring myself to type it, is compiled by Joshua Stevenson, whose musical endeavour - Outhern Acifc+ tickled my ears in a fairly pleasant way with a cassette reviewed herein a few issues back. I'm guessing he's a commendable type of guy, at least if the eclecticism on display here is any measure. Being a compilation, it's probably inevitable that I wouldn't remain erect throughout all of the lucky thirteen tracks, and certainly, I found a few of these far too pointless, atonal, and lengthy for my appreciation. Random noise crap aside, this so resembles an old Peel show in its unexpected divergence of styles, that as each track terminates, one half expects to suddenly hear 'stirling stuff from Mugwumps Ahoy there, I'm sure you'll agree,' followed by a rambling apology for having spilt coffee on someone's flexidisc thus rendering it unlistenable. Ashtray Navigations do their thing. Metabolismus sound uncannily like an E. Smith-less Fall. There's some nice drone bits, some surprisingly fine pseudo-folk, and ooh... other stuff too. Particularly impressive are Terminal Waste Band who turn in a slow - country - drone-lo-fi-losercore type number. 'Garden rock,' it says here. Hmmm. Maybe. One worth getting out of bed for anyway.

One of the names on here, coupled with sixties references, had led me to believe I'd hate this, but it is actually a pretty respectable collection. There's enough to keep you listening to the end, and maybe coming back for more.

**WAR ARROW**

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## Various Artists I/O: Electric Homework compiled from Insine

UNITED KINGDOM INSINE  
INS003 CD (2001)

Here's an independent international survey of new electronic instrumental and experimental music, with four representatives from Tokyo, one New Yorker, two Londoners and one from Exeter. It's a worthy effort, backed up live shows in London to showcase acts, free MP3s downloadable from the website, and promises of future releases on coloured vinyl. The label believes in communicating across borders, though not necessarily in breaking them down. I liked bits of this comp, though I suspect it's largely a boys-only affair, and that most of the young artistes are soloists too. (Well, that's wrong; Duodecimo are two guys). There's a faint whiff of the Industrial here and there, with the concomitant delight in 'unhealthy' pursuits that I find so tedious. But that shouldn't detract from your listening pleasure, and in any case I'm not about to enter into a debate about the 'sexiness' or otherwise of electronica.

Here's a blow-by-blow account for those who need to know:

Yu Nishibori (4 tracks) - Pound for pound, the most versatile of the crew here. I certainly like the good formless noise of his first cut, its violent contrasts of volume, though the source material and basic sound is little more than static bursts. It just runs out of energy quite quickly. His second track is better, a short assemblage of grunting voices. His 'Sum Choi Chicken' is also clever, a surrealist jape in sound. He's also responsible for the quiet menace of the final cut, ten minutes of extremely subtle and tense sound-manipulation that slowly turns into aural torture.

Aidsbot2000 (1 track) - the sort of badly-played and formless electropop I can do without, thanks.

Duodecimo (2 tracks) - nice malevolent brooding, with lots of echo, that never quite becomes 'Industrial'. An impressive control of the effects board. Sustains your interest effectively, by adding new elements and constantly shifting the emphasis. It all suggests alien

languages and out-of-body experiences. The most anti-social of the batch. Extra bonus points for naming yourself after a bookbinding term.

Chinahoneymoon (1 track) - I like this one, more like a landscape and far more varied. Excellent use of layering, giving the impression of depth.

DJ Denka (1 track) - another episode of badly-played electro pop. This one can't even keep time with his own backing tracks as he pecks at his 'Sooty Show' piano. He adds layers of distortion nearer the end, but it still winds up drab. Yuk.

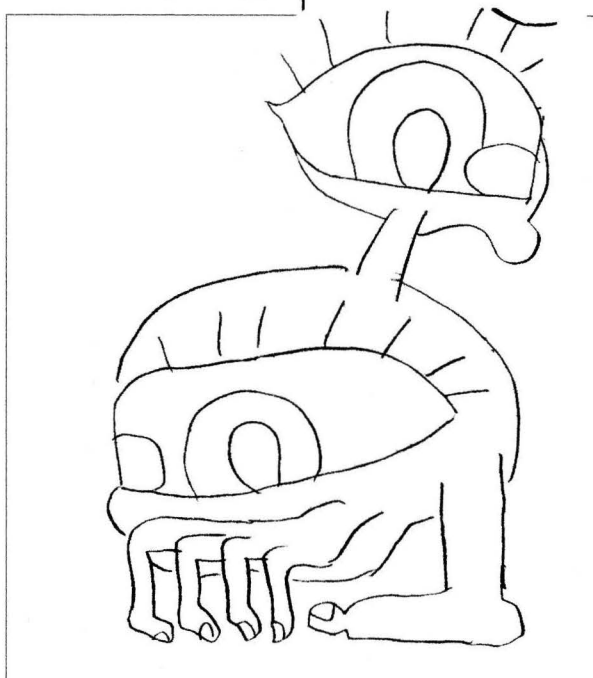
Visco2000 (1 track) - well matey, a naff name like that won't win you any friends, now will it? Neither will your crappy

brigade went that way, lads...

Lambent (1 track) - one long track which, for sheer purity and simplicity is also another stand-out. It begins with very basic monotonous synth droning and mutates after a few minutes into a more approachable, Ambient drone, clarifying itself into a high-pitched screeching chord, something quite transcendent. One to listen to as you plummet out of an aeroplane.

ED PINSENT

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music, one of the weediest parodies of techno ever to leak out of a bedroom. Begone.

Llewellyn ap Gruffydd (1 track) - this one sticks out like a sore thumb from its fellows, mainly because it features environmental recordings, and also because it's so bloody good. Bird-calls and wildlife prelude an acoustic guitar loop pitched against a solid wall of reverb and distortion, building up a heavenly motif that's like a psychedelic-manque record. Lyrical, passionate and excellent.

Crowd Formation (1 track) - extract from a tape release. Jumbled-up voices muttering cyber-speak over a series of unsettling synth lines, punctuated with occasional explosions. Very futuristic, aren't we! The Gary Numan

## Various Artists Art Apart

BELGIUM EE TAPES ET60  
(2001) CD

Call me a nummy but I think I can see in the development of modern experimental music, a parallel with painting around the turn of the last century. If the trad is yer old masters (The Beatles therefore being Corbet), then Faust, Gristle, and oh... loads more - would be Leger, Picabia, Duchamp, Ernst and so on. Recently there's been more and more musical analogies to Anthony Caro and Tate bricks geezer. There seems to be an attempt to break with conventional aesthetics, that is, to create without resorting to the tried and tested conventions. Certain notes and sounds can induce certain

moods and feelings, just as with colours, and maybe all that is too easy, too manipulative. Fair enough, but at the same time, both music and art are forms of language so it seems inevitable that they will communicate on a more rewarding level, for me at least, when speaking with some familiar points of reference. This is why Velasco's landscapes will always affect me more than Matisse's *Snail*, and music which utilises even a modest amount of tonality, repetition and mood will always last longer on my stereo than pure musique concrète. What a great big Garry Bushell old Hector I am.

The problem here seems to be the overusage of ideas which while fine as one-shots just don't have the emotional range to remain interesting on separate occasions. There seems to be a lot of found voice / sound tapes here. It may work on paper but, I dunno, it just seems lazy and pointlessly indulgent to me. Still, with repeated listening, it isn't all bad. Socteau Cirque, The Implicit Order, and Na-Dha all manage likeable and adventurous stuff. Lode Runner succeeds (as he so often does) in taking abstracted edited tones as far as they'll go without it turning into something completely meaningless. De Fabriek offer a surprisingly jazzy grower over which I can almost imagine DMX growling moodily. Reynolds kick up a racket. Empusae and Monoid kick up more rhythmic rackets, each pleasantly reminiscent of those old distorted rhythm tracks by Wiking DDV and Etat Brut. Some good stuff here, but some of it just wasn't for me, which is a shame because I know EE are a good label, and one which definitely deserves your support and encouragement.

WAR ARROW

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## Various Artists Enormous Pile Of CDRs (and a vinyl single) from Fencing Flatworm Recordings

It's lucky that I was recently involved in a traffic accident and so confined to bed for six months, otherwise time simply would not have allowed for digestion of the many Fencing Flatworm discs delivered by a container unit suspended from

beneath one of those big long twin-propellered helicopters you get in films about the 'Nam. Perhaps I exaggerate a little, but there really do seem to be a fuck of a lot of them. CDRs eh? Quantity over quality blah blah blah... but hold on there, Bald Eagle. If CDR as a medium is as rubbish as word on the street (as it were) would have it, Fencing Flatworm may be the exception that proves the rule.

To open on what is probably a relatively unimportant point, can I just say how nice it is to see home produced (either by computer or laser copier) cover and label artwork that doesn't resemble something knocked up by a bored fourteen year old in the back of an exercise book with a leaky biro. This take-it-as-it-comes scrawled approach to design looked fantastic on all those old Fall albums, but now irritates worse than a chilli pepper enema, I would imagine. It's just as contrived as any Yes album cover. Do people believe it lends them an edge of rebel-cool? 'I'm so fucking out there that I doodled the cover in the margin of the Yellow Pages 'cos graphics is for squares.' The only positive aspect of this approach is that it usually provides a pretty accurate indication of how much effort has gone into the music. The Flatworm covers, each of which follows the same rigid formula, are good enough to get their own paragraph in this review.

Each is based around a lavish and colourful photo of some aquatic beast, my particular favourites being the porcupine fish on Kneale / Monk / Henderson's *Cicada Shrines* [Fencing Flatworm Recordings FF008 (2000) CD] and the baby octopus on No Energy's eponymous offering [Fencing Flatworm Recordings FF007 (2000) CD]. Like the plot of *Buttman's European Vacation*, it's simple but extremely effective.

There being such a quantity of these buggers, I'm forced to review them in one big lump for the simple reason that there is neither the time nor space in my life sufficient for more thorough digestion and reportage. Most of the discs last a pleasantly concise thirty minutes or more. The quality seems to be consistently excellent, and there is quite a variety of sounds from disc to disc, although a certain electronic minimalism does dominate to an extent. Midwich's *Every Day Is The Same* [Fencing Flatworm Recordings FF001 (2000) CD] and *Life Underwater* [Fencing Flatworm Recordings FF002 (2000) CD] both manage engaging moments of scarcity, particularly on one piece which vaguely resembles the distant throb of a ship's engine, and suggesting to these ears a stripped down version of Nocturnal Emissions. Random Number's *New Global Vulgar* [Fencing Flatworm Recordings

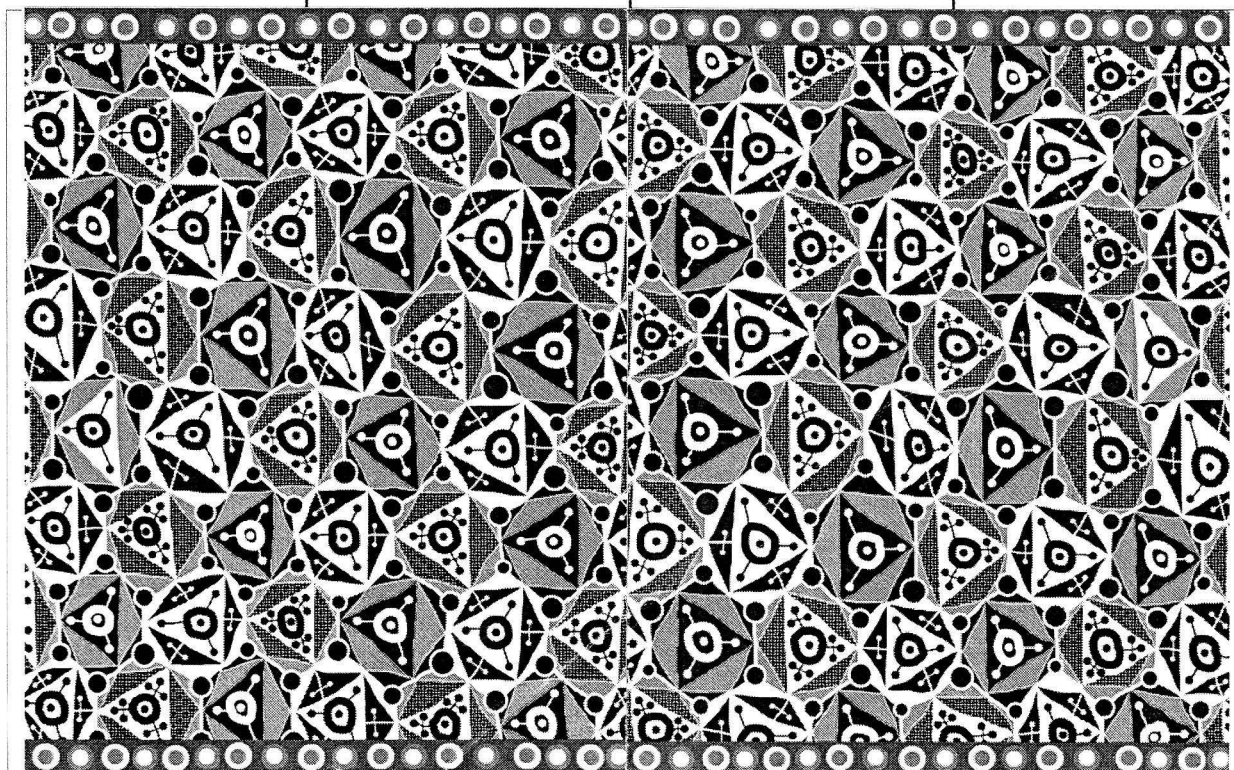
FF005 (2000) CD] is sort of lap-top drum'n'bass but with squeaky noises which at times threatens to get apocalyptic, in a polite sort of way. Klunk's *Infrathin* [Fencing Flatworm Recordings FF009 (2000) CD] is a distant relative of some of the weirder Lode Runner offerings from Racing Room tapes. Kind of like how I expected Oval to sound, except they didn't, so this is preferable. No Energy's disc, mentioned above, seems to weld, rather incongruously, NE style greengate drones onto jazz-era Clock DVA, to convincing effect. *Cicada Shrines*, also mentioned above, is a live performance which to these unadjusted ears resembles an improvised jazz version of Throbbing Gristle, if that isn't too lazy a description. Which it probably is. The weirdos of sore-thumb proportions are Straight Outta Mongolia (great name) whose *S.O.M.* [Fencing Flatworm Recordings FF004 (2000) CD] is stuffed to the gills with tunes, and even songs. They remind me a lot of Severed Heads circa. *Bad Mood Guy* or *The Big Bigot*, which is no bad thing. Being among the more intensely structured music here, the flaws are a bit more obvious. The vocals could be better recorded, and the whole would benefit from a slightly fatter studio sound. But these are only minor quibbles which seemed to have been ironed out for the token vinyl artefact here. No Energy / Midwich / Straight Outta Mongolia / Random

Number who collaborate with each other on *Huddle One* [Fencing Flatworm Recordings FFR-A (2000) blue vinyl 7"] producing a hot blue biscuit of on one side, a heavily-layered looping drone, richer in constituency than a butcher's turd, and on the other, some wonderful percussion which somehow manages to plod along with a caffeine-driven freneticism under a resonating piano riff. Anyone remember Severed Heads' 'Harold & Cindy Hospital'? It's like that, but different, and just as good.

Not everything here has been entirely to my tastes, but even the more inscrutable discs have enough going on to suggest that Fencing Flatworm is one of the few labels that dares to exercise some sort of quality control. Hats off to them, I say.

## WAR ARROW

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[www.geocities.com/termiteclub/ffr.html](http://www.geocities.com/termiteclub/ffr.html)

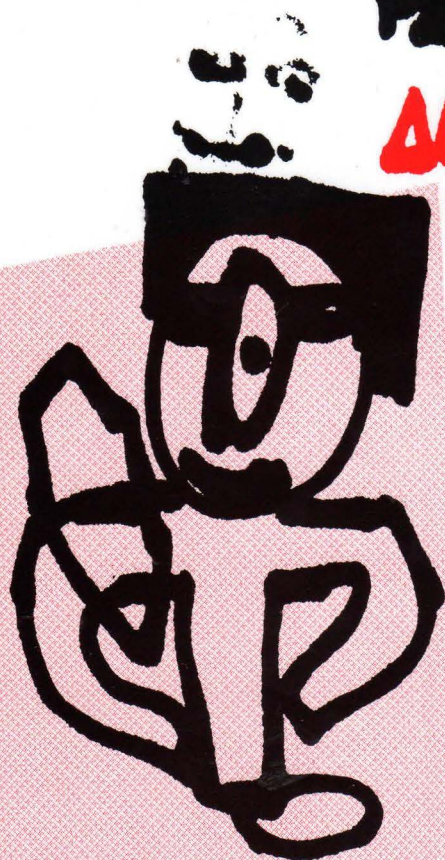








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DRAWINGS

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